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JOHN LEXLEY'S TROUBLES.

VOL. II.

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CHATTO AND WINDUS, PICCADILLY, W.

JOHN LEXLEY'S TROUBLES.

BY

CHARLES W. BARDSLEY, M.A.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

London:

CHATTO AND WINDUS, PICCADILLY.

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"We will add this in general, touching the affection of envy, that of all other affections it is the most importune and continual; for of other affections there is occasion given but now and then; and therefore it was well said, 'Invidia festos dies non agit:' for it is ever working upon some or other."—BACON, *Of Envy*.

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JOHN LEXLEY'S TROUBLES.

CHAPTER I.

"Heralds new-mould men's names—taking from them, adding to them, melting out all the liquid letters, torturing mutes to make them speak, and making vowels dumb—to bring it to a fallacious *homonomy* at the last, that their names may be the same with those noble houses they pretend to."—FULLER.

MR. EMLOTT came down to breakfast the following day with a determined look on his face. The reflections of last night were to be resolved into the actions of to-day. He had not bated one jot of his plans. And the first person he would see after he had left Lansdown Grove this very morning should be Isaac Curling, genealogist. He knew very little about the man personally, but what little he did know gave him a profound contempt for him as a formalist, or churchman—for with Ebenezer the terms were synonymous. A man of this kind he had not the slightest doubt he

could twist and twirl as he liked. Money greased unwilling wheels marvellously.

"Ben, you'll attend to those orders from Dix and Garthstone at once. Them bales must be at the canal wharf by six this evening."

"Very well, uncle; but I thought you said you would prefer to see to it yourself," responded Ben.

"I've something else to do, lad, this morning. The fact is I am going to see that fellow Curling about—about a crest." Ebenezer lingered at the close; Tomkins was just going out of the room, and he was sure he had paused to listen.

"A crest, uncle?" cried the astonished Ben.

"Yes, sir, a crest; and why should I not have a crest as well as any other man of my position?" replied Mr. Emlott, irritated and resentful at Ben's astonished tone.

To tell the truth, the deacon was nervous. He had never gone such lengths as he was now going. Would everybody really laugh at him behind his back? So far there were only two who knew of his intentions, his footman and his nephew; and the one, he knew, under a well-bred air, had hidden away a smile of amusement, while the other had expressed an open and equally significant amazement. But he would go on—this shilly-shallying would not do for him. His argument, he considered, was perfect: there must

have been Emlotts with crests in the past, and it could not be but that there was or had been somewhere throughout the length and breadth of England a family called Emlott possessed of such traditional insignia of honour as coats of arms and heraldic devices. He must have a pedigree traced back, step by step and generation by generation, to one of their junior branches. If this genealogist, as he called himself, could not do it, he must be made to do it.

Nevertheless, with all his faith in the potent influence of hard cash paid down, there was a certain tremulous tone about Mr. Emlott's knock at Isaac's door, which marked him ill at ease.

"Come in," said a somewhat thin voice from within.

Ebenezer entered. The quondam clerk was seated at his breakfast, but he rose as he saw who was his visitor. Somewhat disturbed, too, he seemed—in fact, it was hard to say which of the two appeared the more uncomfortable.

"The fact is"—this was a favourite start of the deacon's—"the fact is, Mr. Curling, I've come on a little matter of business as lies, I believe, in your line o' trade." There was no chance of Ebenezer recovering his English until he had regained his composure. Still, he had made the first plunge and already felt better.

"Business, sir, did you say? I can't rightly say as I am in any particular line o' business at present. I'm not clerk o' th' church now, you know. I gave it up some time ago—in fact, it'll be twelve months come the 29th September next; and Gregory Simms has it, as lives beside the church gate, next door to th' inn."

"Church clerks ain't much more i' my way than churches, Mr. Curling," replied Ebenezer, with a grim smile. "I didn't come to see you as clerk, but as genealogist—unless you've dropped that profession as well, i' which case it 'ud be better to have that big streak o' tall talk down that's over your door and window on th' outside. I don't approve o' ornament at th' expense o' truth; it's not our way at Zion, I 'sure you." The deacon was slowly feeling his way into something like courage.

"No, I never seed no ornament i' Zion at any one's expense; you're right there, no doubt. It is the barest and most naked-looking hole I ever set eyes on," responded Isaac, drily; and he took a big piece of toast and swallowed it, immediately pouring a cup of weak tea down his throat to insure its progress.

"It's the inward adornment we thinks on, Mr. Curling," said the deacon, glibly; "'a meek and quiet spirit, which is of great price.'"

"That's why you sends so little to market, p'raps,"

rejoined Isaac, who if it came to quotation would, he knew, be nonplussed at once. "But howsumdever that may be, I've not given up my genealogical studies, and I shall be pleased to assist you to the best of my ability."

Both felt better now. Each had had a retort. The deacon, too, had quoted Scripture, and the genealogist had been enabled to introduce one or two of his long words.

"The fact is"—once more the favoured expression came out—"the fact is, Mr. Curling, I want a pedigree made out; there are one or two inaccuracies, I fear, in the one I have at home, and I want to recover the Emlott family crest. It's been in disuse for several generations, and I can't get a copy anywhere."

"Dear me!" said Isaac, in a tone of the dryest sympathy. He knew all about the greengrocery business as well as Ebenezer Emlott himself.

"No, do what I will, I can't lay my hand on it, so to say. I've looked over all my papers, but it's not there."

"It's not, maybe, on a seal?" rejoined Isaac, with a covert smile.

"No. I know my grandfather used to have a seal; I can remember it dangling from his fob; but it got out o' sight somehow, and I can't find it. The fact is, Mr. Curling, it's like committing suicide; we Emlotts

has been a-throwing o' our rights and claims away from generation to generation. To think o' our having burnt all them papers and parchments wi' all them seals on, and to ha' mislaid the stamp itself. I'm out of all patience wi' my ancestors, I can assure you. But for me, you know, it might have gone on for ever and ever."

"Ah—men!" responded the ex-clerk solemnly, and in stentorian tones. "I beg your pardon," he said, blushing and laughing, "I fancied at the moment we wur in church."

The deacon laughed too, very heartily indeed; he affected to consider it one of the finest jokes that had ever come under his observation. He was getting on famously, far better than he had hoped, and was disposed to humour the genealogist to the top of his bent, if he was so minded.

"We cannot throw off the habits of years, Mr. Curling. It's impossible. No more can we throw away the claims and rights o' families."

"Rights are as indefeasible as wrongs is indefensible," replied Isaac grandly, as if charging a jury.

"True. Remarkably well put, sir. Rights, as you say, is indefeasible, wrongs is indefensible. As I take it, if I might be permitted to expound such a passage o' legal scripture, I should say that the wrongs

inflicted by my ancestors on me, and any family which might be founded upon me, are wholly and absolutely without defence; but that they do not debar me from my claim to such family belongings as a crest, or other armorial quarterings, as has been in the habit o' being handed down from one gener——" Ebenezer had used this phrase before: he corrected himself—"i' the accustomed manner."

"Till they wur finally lost?" added Isaac.

"Well, we will not say finally lost, Mr. Curling, for I trust implicitly to your skill to replace them for me. With your knowledge of family history—a knowledge I have heard most highly spoken of,—most highly spoken of, I do assure you—I trust for better things. I shall hope to hear from you in a reasonable time what is the heraldic device I have the power to use, whether it be in blue on the paper I write upon, or in red upon the panels of my carriage. I need not add that I shall look upon this purely as a business matter, and shall pay you accordingly."

Isaac's eye gleamed with an unmistakable lustre. There had been a good deal of pride at the bottom of that big sign outside. When an annuity of sixty-five pounds a year had come to him by bequest from a distant relative, who had made a good thing out of a shop at Manchester, he had retired from the clerkship of the church solely that he might carry on undisturbed

those genealogical and other researches which his taste had engendered. At first he had not thought that gain might accrue to him thereby. But after a few months he discovered that he could turn his studies to profit. Several solicitors, not exactly local, but in the neighbouring district, had appealed to him for sundry pieces of information which the parish registers had failed to give. He had supplied it, and he had received from each, by return of post, half-a-crown in penny stamps. Shortly after this he had recovered for a widow ten pounds a year, the claim to which she had no cognizance of, until Isaac, through his curiously-derived stores of knowledge, had made her acquainted with the fact. This had been bruited about, and Isaac Curling had become an important personage in the eyes of the poorer classes of Lackington. Even those in a better station looked upon him as a kind of interesting curiosity. He was pointed out to casual visitors as one of the local oddities. He had come to be styled the "walking genealogist," and this, when it came to his ears, fanned his pride. Then came the brilliant thought that he might take a professional stand in the matter. He put up the sign which has already figured several times in the course of this narrative, and began to dress after a particular fashion. He wore high collars, and dressed in black.

He put on the airs, and assumed the manners, of one of the legal profession, much to the disdain of Mr. Skillicorne. But then he had succeeded in bringing to light certain facts in support of a case which that gentleman had thrown up in utter despair.

Mr. Emlott's offer came opportunely. He wanted a little ready money very much just now. His late wanderings had cost no trifle, although they had been performed with the most careful regard to economy. All the money on which he could lay hands had been spent, and yet he wanted five pounds at this moment more than he had ever wanted it during the whole course of his life. There was to be a sale of furniture at Lackington in the following week. Among a large assortment of ordinary household and farmstead gear, there was a curious chair of carved oak, thoroughly antique. He had made a personal inspection of that chair, and he had found the wood almost black with age, and polished as a mirror. Above were delicately cut the arms of the Bramptons of Brampton. How it had got to the farmhouse he could not tell, and this was enough to engage his interest in itself. A family story might hinge upon the possession of that chair, and he might be the happy man who should unravel the mystery. Have that chair he must, if he had to borrow the money at a fabulous interest.

Thus it was that his eyes lit up when Ebenezer Emlott spoke of crests from a business point of view.

"The main point we have to consider, Mr. Emlott, is this—which Emlotts are you, the Emlotts of Bassingham, or the Emlotts of Quickset? Once get at that, and all is straight." It seemed that the greengrocery business was to be avoided by mutual and tacit consent.

"But will not the coat of arms be the same in either case?" asked the elder.

"By no means. They are a distinct stock," rejoined the genealogist.

"I thought one of them must of necessity be an offshoot of the other," said Ebenezer, "and that it was a mere question which could claim precedence; that is, which was the stem, and which the branch."

"No, they are both stems; they each belong to a separate family. Their crests are different."

"But are not all the Emlotts, whether in the Lackington local guide or the London 'Post Office Directory,' sprung originally from one stock?" asked the moneyed man, who began to feel the ground giving way beneath him. He had hoped for a kind of general right of connection with all the Emlotts in England who at that particular moment might be in such a position of life as to make such con-

nection acceptable, and who might be possessed of a crest.

"Not by no means of necessity. We might take sich a name as Roby, for instance. Thomas and Harry lives at Roby, say, so far back as six centuries ago, and is in no wise related to one another Thomas leaves, and goes to London to better himself. He gets styled Thomas o' Roby, or, for short, Thomas Roby, and when he marries and dies, his children sticks to th' name. Meanwhile, Harry cuts the old place, too, and he strikes York way. His chums there calls him Harry o' Roby, or, again, for short, Harry Roby. He marries, like t'other, begets children, and when he dies hands 'em down his name, perhaps because he's nowt else to offer them. Thus there is two Robys, wholly distinct."

"And how is it with the Emlotts? Is there a place called Emlott?" asked Ebenezer in a tone of interest.

"No; th' Emlotts is what we calls a pure patronymic surname. Th' Robys was a local surname," replied Isaac, sagely.

"What's a patronymic surname?" inquired the elder.

"It's a name taken fro' the father's baptismal name," said the genealogist.

"Ay, they were a benighted lot i' those times,"

broke in the Baptist. "We's getting more enlightened now."

"Well, I'll try and enlighten you a bit more, if you'll please to listen," testily rejoined the formalist. "I'm saying as your name's a patronymic, but i' reality it's a metronymic. A name as is taken fro' the father is a patronymic; a name as is taken fro' the mother is a metronymic. We'll choose a illustration o' each. Mr. Jackson, as is baker at the corner o' Scudd Lane, is one of the first lot. His ancestor——"

"A baker ha' ancestors! Eh, but that's a good un!" broke in the rich scion of the greengrocery line.

"Well, we'll say his forefather. His forefather was Tom, the son of Jack. Thus he came to be styled Tom, Jack's son—Tom Jackson, do ye see? Sometimes they didn't add son at th' end, as is the case wi' your footman, Mester Tomkins." The rich man trembled. "Now, your name is o' this latter class, only it come through th' mother. Probably her son was a posthumous child, or she wur more active-like than her husband; anyways, th' neighbours has styled th' child as hers, reythur than his. In your case, your maternal ancestor——"

"Ay, ay, I see; go on," said his gratified listener. Maternal ancestor sounded well—surely he could claim a crest after that.

"Your maternal ancestor's name was 'Amelia' or 'Emelia,' but betwixt friends liberties is allowed, and they allus tacked on a French termination, and called Emelia 'Emelot,' just as they called Emma 'Emmot,' or Mary 'Mariot,' or Philip 'Philpot,' or William 'Wilmot.' Thus Dick or Tom or Harry, or whatsoever her child's name was, took his way into th' world——"

"Ah, it's a wicked world, Mr. Curling. Well, well?" put in the deacon.

"Took his way into the world, in spite o' all hindrances," added the antiquarian with asperity, for he did not relish such interruptions to his narrative, "as Dick Emelot, or Emlott, as i' course o' time it would be shortened into."

"Dear me, how very interesting!" said the owner of the name which had been the subject of such a lengthened discourse. "Considering the termination, I may assume, then, that my name is French, or rather Norman, eh?"

"You'll assume wrong, then. Th' lower classes o' English folk was very fond of these furrin endings. People talks about th' Saxon and Norman, and about hatreds and sich like, but th' Saxons seem to ha' taken to th' Norman names and endings like ducks to watter." The student of registers was beginning to generalize now that he had got through his explanations.

"Then there may be half a dozen Emlotts of totally distinct stocks?" suggested Ebenezer, bringing back the conversation to the point in which he was more immediately interested.

"Unquestionably," said Isaac; "a score, if you like. There is Emlotts as stand as high as any folk i' England, and there is Emlotts as wouldn't own their own grandmother, if their lives depended on it."

Ebenezer tried to look as if his life were not in the least in jeopardy, but his attempt was not very successful.

"And about the crest, Mr. Curling—for, after all, that is the subject upon which I have come for your advice?"

"The best plan will be for you to leave it in my hands; I can give you all the information necessary by Saturday."

"Thank you, that will do nicely. I should like to know as early as possible, as I expect to have my carriage down next week, and I should like the crest to be painted up in town; they do those kind of things in tip-top style, I am told," said the mill-owner.

"No doubt of it, sir. They have a good deal o' that class o' business on hand. And as to payment, perhaps——" The genealogist paused.

"Oh, we shall not quarrel about the payment.

Let us say—what shall we say for the job, now?" asked Ebenezer, cautiously.

"I never like to be hard on Lackington folk, sir, one's own flesh and blood, as one might say—from a parochial point of view, that is."

"I am not so fond of parochial points of view myself, you know," put in the deacon, who did not seem so proud of the connection thus thrust upon him.

"Well, I'll not tread on your prejudices, sir. I only meant for to say as it is not the thing to come down heavily on them as one has seen grow up from infancy at one's side, and whose parents one can remember as sich patterns of integrity and industry in that station of life which it has pleased——"

"Quite so, quite so, my good friend. I've doubts about the Catechism, you know; and so, let us say two pounds for the job complete?" urged Mr. Emlott.

The fact was, to use his own phrase, these reminiscences were far from pleasant to him. He could see through the window from where he stood the exact spot where the greengrocery business was still flourishing, although under other hands.

"I am afraid, Mr. Emlott, you do not understand that I am a professional man, and that I ha' my views o' what is consistent i' the discharge of its duties, and what is proper i' th' payment thereof. I must object

to any suggestion upon the subject o' the charge. Suggestions must come from myself. My bill would ha' bin seven guineas had you bin a stranger; but, as I was about to observe when you interrupted me, I cannot forget that you wur born, bred, and—buttered, so to say, in Lackington, and on that account I make the voluntary reduction of, say, two pounds or so. I am sorry to ask you to pay on account, but as this business will involve a certain amount of expense, which I am na prepared at this moment to meet, I shall be obliged if you will favour me with the sum o' five pounds five shillings"

"It's a large sum, Mr. Curling," put in the deacon, thoughtfully.

"If you think the profit to yourself thereupon not sufficiently satisfactory, you have only to say so. I didna seek the job," said Isaac, with a professional flourish.

"Oh, I am sure you will do your best, and that that best will thoroughly meet my wishes, Mr. Curling. As you say, there will doubtless be expenses to be incurred incidental to the affair, and I will pay, however unusual such an act may be, the sum you mention. Perhaps you will kindly sign me a receipt."

"Certainly. Business, o' course, is business. I should be wronging the profession generally if I were

to forget that. You may depend upon me about the crest, sir." And Isaac took the five-pound note with a delight which he could scarcely hide.

"You know I'm not particular myself about the Emlotts' crest, Mr. Curling. If you should happen to know of a nice genteel-looking thing in the way of armorial bearings which would suit my carriage, you can—— But I leave everything to your superior judgment. Still, I should not like to think that your genius was under restraint. The Emlotts of Bassingham, of course, are all that is satisfactory, and I have no doubt that research in th' right quarter would elicit information that would set all question at rest as regards the connection. Nevertheless, I would not confine the range o' your inquiries; it would be unfair to your powers."

"I will see that you are satisfied, Mr. Emlott," said Isaac, feeling the edge of the note with his fingers.

"Then that is all right," replied the deacon, quite relieved to find how easily the whole affair had been managed, and perfectly aware that the five-pound note had helped to smooth down its difficulties. He knew himself the value of money too well to be ignorant of this.

"By the way, I hope you enjoyed your late wanderings, Mr. Curling. These outings must cost

money, but I suppose the enjoyment well repays the difficulties and expense of the journey." Mr. Emlott said this as he was putting on his gloves; he had already risen.

Isaac instantly changed colour. The same disturbed look came over his face that had overspread it when he first saw Emlott enter. "Yes, it costs money," he said at length.

"Might I ask was it purely for pleasure, or did business occupy your attention at all," asked Ebenezer, curiously.

"Something of both." Isaac was vainly endeavouring to hide his discomposure.

"Oh, then I suppose you were riding your hobby—inspecting ancient documents, scrutinizing parchments, visiting registers, eh?" inquired the manufacturer, looking at Isaac and wondering why he was so agitated.

Isaac Curling gave one steady look in return, and made up his mind. "Mr. Emlott, I know all about it; perhaps it's best to tell you."

"About what?" cried his astonished companion.

"About Mr. Johnnie," said Isaac, quietly.

Instantly Mr. Ebenezer Emlott was himself. There was a mystery, then, about Johnnie, after all. Ralph Lexley's varying moods and capricious tempers, one day so amenable to his, the deacon's, will,

another day so outspoken in his passion—all this was the result of a heart burdened with a hidden and shameful secret. The suspicion which had lain half slumbering in his soul for so many years was well founded, after all. His brother-in-law was in his hands. He could break, bruise, or blast him at his will; he could thrust, threaten, or thwart him as he listed. Ralph Lexley held a secret about Johnnie, and feared disclosure. As the manufacturer thought of his nephew, his eye gleamed with a sense of savage triumph. Yes, it would indeed be possible now to revenge himself for all the annoyance and quiet contempt he had received at the hands of both father and son, for that they had despised him through all his tyranny in the Grange household he could not hide from himself. All this came into his mind with the quickness of a flash of light. He must learn this secret, and to learn it he must pretend that he already knew it. With a tremulous tone which was far from feigned, he replied—

"I feared as much, Mr. Curling."

"Ay, I was at work up i' London on another matter, professional i' coorse, and wur searching and writing relative to that, when I comed upo' this affair o' Mester Johnnie's."

"It must have startled you dreadfully," said the mill-owner.

"Not immediately. I wur very interested, in coorse, by reason of its being Mr. Ralph Lexley's wedding, and, as I copies everything, I put it down carefully i' my Lexley family-tree. But it was not till I got fairly thinking over it, and wur inspecting of it again, that it flashed upon me quick like, 'Why, Mester Johnnie mun ha' bin three year old when this marriage took place.'"

"Ah, I was allus afeard as that register would let it all out," replied the deacon, scarcely able to open his lips from the agony of sheer suspense. "I suppose it is still in the same church? They don't shift records from vestry to vestry i' your church, do they?"

"No. It wur in St. Martin's, Bristol Street, and it wur there that the service was performed."

"Yes, the same church," muttered the deacon, affecting a knowledge upon the point. "Will you let me take a copy of the registry from your own? I have often wished for one."

Isaac assented, and the mill-owner took down the extract with slow and careful penmanship.

"I canna tell you how sorry I am for Mester Johnnie," said Isaac, when the task was done. "He and me, you know, has chummed a good bit over these pursoots, as we are both so fond on. It welly (nearly) broke my heart, it did. He doesn't know owt about it, i' course?" asked the genealogist.

"No; he is as yet ignorant of everything relating to this sad affair," replied the manufacturer. "But it will be a question with us how long it must be kept from him now he's getting so old; and, you see, it's so cruel to let a lad think as he's coming into a fine estate like that o' Lexley Grange, and he all the time no more claim to it nor that dog as is crossing the road. I say, as I has said to Ralph many a time, it's cruel; and the lad must be told on't. Every day and every year'll make it but the harder."

"So it will; there's no doubt o' that head," said Isaac. "However, p'raps you'll excuse me, but the bell will be dropping soon, and it's a good five minutes' from heer to th' church."

The deacon, on any other occasion, would have thrust sore at Isaac for the offering of such vain service as was indicated by attendance at morning and afternoon prayer. But he had learnt something just now that had put even his carriage, his footman, and his armorial quarterings out of his head. He shook the antiquarian by the hand, and went out without saying a word. As he went on his way he pondered deeply. The men at the mill wondered what had come over the master that day. He did not neglect his work, nor did he omit to superintend the work of others; but he was very silent, and his face was peculiarly subdued and still, saving when now and then a gleam

of malicious joy shone out of his eyes. Nevertheless, he did not leave the mill till his day's labour was completely at an end. When he got home and had dined, and Tomkins had left him, and the chairs were set, and he had dismissed Ben, then he began to think as he had not thought for many a day. The subject of his meditation was this—How was the revelation of this secret to be made, and when and where? In the course of his reflections I believe he nearly got round the table twice.

CHAPTER II.

"When I lie waking all alone,
Recounting what I have ill done,
My thoughts on me then tyrannize;
Fear and sorrow me surprise."

DEMOCRITUS JUNIOR.

WHEN Ebenezer Emlott got up the next morning his mind was fully decided. Johnnie's father, at least, should be made aware that this tale of shame and mystery was no longer confined to the limits he imagined—that, in fact, the secret was out. What action he might take after this must be left for future consideration. I wonder if it is absolutely necessary that when a man is about to do something extremely unpleasant he always dresses carefully? The young man disappointed in love, and bent on suicide, always clothes himself in his Sunday suit; and it will be found that, as a rule, he who is determined on offering up his honour upon the altar of personal revenge will present himself before his

victim duly clad: the sacrificial robe will not be forgotten; he will put a clean collar on; he will be particular about his tie. Immaculate linen does not of necessity conceal an irreproachable heart. Mr. Emlott dressed with fastidious care this morning.

The Grange people were at breakfast when he arrived, and he sat down, at his sister's invitation, to take a cup of tea. Tea was all but invariably used for the morning meal in Lackington. The elder folk among the lower and middle classes drank it at every meal.

"Well, how is the invalid, sister?" he inquired, after he had taken one or two meditative sips.

"Wonderfully better, thank God. Now that he has taken the turn, his progress is most rapid. And Ralph is better. He suffered dreadfully during the few days that preceded the crisis. Indeed, I thought I should have had the whole house upon my hands, for Geoffrey could not or would not sleep."

Mr. Lexley's eye shone with a bright lustre as he looked at Jane. "And faithful to your responsibilities you would have been, dear. If Johnnie recover—of course he is better, but I cannot trust myself to speak with confidence yet—but I say that if Johnnie recover, it will be the work, under God, not of his father nor brother, but his mother, his own mother, as you have proved yourself to be. Geoffrey, like myself, would

have laid down his life if it would have helped to his recovery; but we were both men, and the sick room is ordained, I believe, to be the arena of woman's triumph. If life could at all times be saved by substitution, the world would die by proxy; for I do not believe the man lives who could not find some one to lay down his life for him. But so long as we are personally subject to all the ills that flesh is heir to, so long will woman have the greater triumph."

"There are times when such triumphs are dearly won," said Ebenezer, quietly.

"Yes, when the nurse sinks under the weight of her care, and is a sacrifice to her own devotion," replied Ralph.

"I was not thinking of that." Ebenezer took another sip.

"I do not understand you, then." Mr. Lexley was in one of his bold moods this morning.

"And yet my statement was simple enough. I only meant that there might be occasions when it might be well to ask the question whether it was expedient for the sick one's sake that his life should be protracted." Mr. Lexley seemed suddenly and wonderfully cowed. "For instance, no one will doubt that it was a merciful dispensation that took away the life of that little child of Martha Timmins, whose husband, after trying to murder her, threw himself

into the canal two days afore the little one was born. Then, there are facts that frequently surround the birth of a child, which——"

"Of course, viewed in that light, your remark was correct," interrupted Ralph Lexley, hastily.

"You agree with me, in fact?" asked the deacon.

"So far as your statement is general, certainly," responded his brother-in law.

"Ah, just so—just so!"

Geoffrey was somewhat astonished with the turn the conversation had taken, but he did not say anything. He now got up to go to the works. Jane also left the room; and thus the two were alone.

It was wonderful how short the conversation was that followed. "You can guess, I suppose, why I made that remark, Ralph?" said Ebenezer. "I have discovered your secret."

"You have discovered my secret!" gasped out his brother-in-law. He seemed on the instant to be paralyzed with terror. An icy numbness seized his limbs. He shook with such fright that he fell rather than sat back upon his chair.

"Yes. I am sorry for Johnnie," replied the deacon, quietly.

"For his sake alone have I lived these twenty-five years. Brother, you will never betray me to him?" This was said with an earnest, yearnful look, far

more pleading than if he had thrown himself in the wildest demonstration of persuasion at his feet. But he addressed a rock, for granite could not be harder than Ebenezer's face just now.

"Think of his future," continued Ralph Lexley. "The chapel will pity and scorn him; and he will scorn but not pity me."

"I make no promises, for I shall reserve to myself freedom of action in this matter. Meantime, I leave you to your own reflections; if they are unpleasant, you can remind yourself that the just retribution of Heaven comes sooner or later. The sooner would have been th' better in your case; the later has but increased your difficulties, and will eventually but add to your self-reproaches."

"Ebenezer, you do not think of exposing me? That would be cowardly!" The man was writhing in agony.

"I make no promise. Circumstances must be my guide." This was said coldly, and with a dispassionate air that threw Ralph Lexley into a swoon of despair. He made no further appeal, but once more lay back in his chair. He looked moodily, as it seemed, into the fireplace. There was in his face the stillness of a smothered fire: the smouldering embers might again burst forth into a blaze.

Ebenezer went out without another word, and

left him where he sate. He had performed his part with an unruffled composure. Even his rebuke had been marked by a most temperate and impartial tone. In all this was displayed the behaviour of one who knew himself to be from henceforth master. From this time forward his victim lay bound hand and foot, so that he could do with him according as his will might dictate. In such a case passion was unnecessary, nay, unseemly: it was but to blunt the fine edge of his triumph. A true victory displays itself in a quiet assumption of superiority at all points, and it must be the result of judgment, not temper. Ebenezer Emlott walked with serene and untroubled face to the mill, and there he attended to his daily round of duty with cool and calm dispassion.

In the mean time Ralph Lexley sate in his chair, and did not move. He seemed like one in a stupor. He might have been under the influence of a narcotic were it not for the anguished expression on his lip and eye. His memory was hard at work, however. 'Twas easy to be seen his mind was away in the past. He was slowly retracing the footprints of his unforgotten life—that saddest of all tasks even when the pathway has smiled most, even when the memories recalled are the most purely bright. To look back is to awaken a pain; for faces are missed, and the dim outline of scenes and groups that can never again be made

up creates its own shadow, and casts it athwart the heart. To welcome such joys again, it is not merely that our Lazaruses must be called forth and relieved of their grave-clothes—that would be the easier hindrance—but we ourselves must have thrown off those more tainted garments of an accumulated experience of the world—the experience that hardens, that makes indifferent, that superinduces cynicism; in a word, before we can make the past an unstinging joy we must be set up in our primal position of innocence and ignorance; we must unlearn what we have learnt, and undo that we have done.

Whether he who sate thus stupor like had gone so far back as his youth and innocence, we cannot say, but his face grew softer, and his eye moistened, and by-and-by the tears began one by one to fall upon his cheek. No one who looked upon him just now, nay, who saw him every day, would ever set down Ralph Lexley as having been a bad man—bad in the sense that the world holds bad. Even the aspect of weakness in his face appeared the weakness of mental rather than moral indecision. Sensuality was conspicuous by its absence. His large eyes ranged widely, but if they had a bold look, their glance was pure as their own blue. His cheeks were thin and pinched—they were even wizened—but secret care, rather than open sin, had

made its mark thus, and it required no skilful physiologist to make the distinction. The lines of sin and the lines of care are not alike. Certainly his lips were undecided. He was a man who could be readily biased—biased into a perilous path, biased into an imminent danger ; and yet, as you mentally conjectured this, you felt that below there was a conscience, and a sensitive susceptibility to its decisions, that would save from actual hurt. Nevertheless, if men like this fall, it is a life-fall. Either the man is drawn into the whirlpool, and cannot regain his feet, but goes down with the stream ; or he is ever standing upon the brink of the vortex, and inspecting the spot where he was so nearly drowned, with a nervous and diseased interest. The circumstance is never forgotten, and it shapes and characterizes his life.

Some such crisis had manifestly set its mark on Johnnie's father. Everybody in Lackington had a kind of unspoken feeling—many, probably, were scarce aware of its existence—that Mr. Lexley of the Grange would have been a very different man but for a something which they could not explain. Whether that something lay within or without they could not say. If internal, it was some peculiar want, some certain and fixed mental gap, which they, poor and unpractised physiologists, could not be expected to decide upon. If external, there had been some great

catastrophe, which coming at a certain age had baulked Nature, as it were, in the formation of his mind and character. That "something had gone wrong" will perhaps best express the hazy opinion afloat in the town as to Ralph Lexley's earlier life, and that the period of his sojourn in London was the date of this wrong was also as generally and dimly accepted. The squire was getting old, and so were the men of his generation, and, but for his peculiarities, all this would have long lapsed into the shade of forgotten things. As it was, people did not speak of it, saving on special occasions, when memories had been revived, and Grewby and Lexley and Lackington affairs had undergone discussion as part and parcel of the same topic—so much more necessary to the town were the two families in the past than now, when manufacturers and mills were beginning to jog against one another at every turn.

Ralph Lexley sat on for a while. The tears continued to fall, and the pained expression again returned to his brow. But far worse than the anguish was that look of stolid despair, that aspect of hopeless despondency, that seemed suddenly to have taken firm hold upon his face. It sat so naturally, albeit so unnaturally, that it would appear as though the countenance had been preparing beforehand for its coming guest, and that when he arrived

he had nothing to do but make his home there. Assuredly, inward sorrow must have done its work ere the outward feelings could so quickly accustom themselves to such an expression of spiritless dejection.

By-and-by he went upstairs. He did not often go to the mill. He had left the business there almost entirely in the charge of his two sons, so soon as they were old enough to undertake an active share in its duties. The great responsibility rested upon the manager, and he was quite equal to the work required at his hands. The cheery voice of Johnnie met his ear as he reached the door of the invalid's room, and he found both his son and his wife in bright mood; for again the doctor had been, and again he had declared that his patient was better, and that his visits would shortly be useless, except to swell his bill, and that he was not positive he was not coming even now with that sole intent.

"Father, I am to get up this afternoon. Even mother here does not object," was the invalid's greeting.

"God is very good," was all the parent could respond.

And then, after another word or two, he went down again, and Jane and Johnnie knew that something was amiss. But they were accustomed to his peculiarities, and thought less of it just then.

He went down again; and again he sate in the armchair, and bent his head till it rested upon his hands. Was it true, after all, what Ebenezer had said? Was Jane's triumph dearly won? Would it not, indeed, have been better for his son had he never been born? and, having been born and reared so many years, was it true that even now it were better that he had died of this bold attempt to save a fellow-creature's life? Alas! he could but re-echo his brother-in-law's words. His life was dearly won. This triumph over death did, indeed, but seem a victory where, nevertheless, everything was lost. How did Ebenezer get hold of his secret? and, having got it, how could he hope that he, of all others, would maintain it? In his heart's depth Ralph Lexley felt that his past life lay naked and open in the sight of the whole world.

If only it could be kept from Johnnie; if only he could keep his son's love; if only his one favoured child, the memento of so much short-lived happiness —for amid so much pain the man was a man, and would not deny that he had been happy—if only he could live on, ignorant of the evil that surrounded his birth! He almost felt, in the face of that greater disaster—a child's reproaches, that he could bear to meet all other people with calmness. Not even their curses could move him, if he might be spared his

son's upbraiding look and word of bitterness and censure. He had been happy: he, John Lexley, felt miserable as he remembered that he could never get rid of the sense of a past happiness. How often he had dwelt upon it, hating his own heart that he could not make such memories as bitter as they ought to be! No, even now, even in this hour of retributive vengeance, he looked back upon that period as a time of rare felicity. Perhaps it was for this his penalty had come; perchance for this it was the day of reckoning had dawned.

How strange that at this very time other hearts should be so blithe! But so it is. The sky is not overclouded everywhere; and just now Geoffrey's part of creation was unsullied with a single cast of gloom. On his way home to tea on this same day he had met Cécile on the road to the parsonage. This was not the first time that this occurrence had happened, for Geoffrey had learnt of late to study his watch with care towards the fall of the afternoon; and were it not that Cécile's adjournment from Westbourne Villa was uncertain, it is very clear that this rencontre would have become an established event. To-day fortune smiled upon him, and at the juncture of the lane that brought the governess upon the main road he overtook her.

Cécile held out her hand with frank forwardness.

What Mrs. Bland and Maria would have said we need not contemplate. Neither of them was witness of such a flagrant breach of maiden propriety. Doubtless by their code it would have been Cécile's duty to have bolted into the woody knoll between the pathway and the stream, and hidden behind that very thick and gnarled oak till the young man had passed by. Thus, as of old time the royal tree had sheltered a kingly crown from peril, so now the queenly tiara of propriety would have been preserved from imminent assault. The only difference was that the Crown climbed into the tree. Not even Mrs. Bland's scruples would have demanded that from the Tiara. But Cécile was not thinking of oak trees, nor King Charles, nor even of the young man; or if he forced himself upon her thoughts as he dawned into view, she did not picture to herself any strange danger from a performance of that simple act of courtesy which we call shaking hands.

"I have seen your aunt," he said eagerly, retaining her hand in his grasp for one instant.

"Indeed, Mr. Lexley."

"Yes; and she has invited me to join in your picnic to-morrow. It was so kind of her. May I hope that you will have no objection to the arrangement?"

"I wonder how she could dare to do such a thing.

You must know, Mr. Geoffrey, that she has nothing to do with it. The picnic is given entirely by uncle, out of his own money, and he has appointed me manager."

"Oh, then I am to ask your permission first?" said Geoffrey, laughing.

"It is no laughing matter, I assure you," replied Cécile, with a mock solemnity. "I am bound by my trust to be careful in my administration. I have made calculations not merely of the number of the party, but of their age and appetite; and, striking a balance thereupon, I have put up provision for exactly eight—uncle, aunt, the children, and myself. My only difficulty is Bobbie; for if, out of sheer excitement, he should refuse his breakfast, my arithmetic will be a failure. He will eat our heads off at the abbey."

"That would be a calamity indeed! Had I not better go to protect you from such an indignity?" asked Geoffrey, with an affectation of anxiety.

"There's something in that, certainly," responded Cécile, preserving a staid countenance with some difficulty.

"Then I may come?" rejoined the young man, quickly.

"You must ask Uncle Joseph," replied the governess.

"I will do so at once." The idea seemed to suit Geoffrey uncommonly. He prepared to walk beside Miss Marnott. It was a good ten minutes' walk from thence to the parsonage, and the prospect of a *tête-à-tête* conversation with Cécile was anything but displeasing. But it was not so to be.

"Very well; you will find him at the mission-room in Scudd Lane. He has gone there to make arrangements about the open air services on Sunday afternoon."

As this lay in an exactly opposite direction from the parsonage, poor Geoffrey felt that he had been worsted. He had fallen by his own sword; he had stumbled into the pit he himself had dug.

"I will go now," he said, with a crestfallen air. "Good-bye."

"Good-bye. I hope you will be successful, for Garsington Abbey is the most charming place in the world." And Cécile sped on her way homeward. Apart from her customary tasks, there were many preparations to make for the picnic, and she was not sorry to be quit of her companion, especially as his going with them to-morrow, which she looked upon as a foregone conclusion, would involve a larger and—Cécile was a woman—a more careful preparation. How fond of Geoffrey Lexley her aunt was! Think of her asking him to join them,

when it was all arranged to be such a cosy family outing, just themselves and nobody else. But she was not sorry he was going with them; on the contrary, she was very glad. He would be a companion for her uncle; and, besides, the children almost idolized him; and, in fact, his cheery ways and his ready tact in meeting all those little difficulties that occur, and which, when met good-humouredly, make up three-fourths of the pleasure of a picnic, would insure that their excursion should be a success.

"Do you know who is to go with us to-morrow, Cécile?" asked her aunt soon after her niece had entered the sitting-room.

"Yes; I met Mr. Geoffrey at the lane-end, and he told me you had invited him," replied Cécile.

"You met him at the lane-end?" repeated Mrs. Haddock, somewhat curiously. "What could have brought him there at five o'clock in the afternoon?"

"He was on his way home to tea. He returns to the mill for an hour afterwards."

"I did not know that; I thought he remained at the mill till seven, and came home for a late tea," said Mrs. Haddock, looking at her niece narrowly, and speaking with just the faintest inflection of suspicion. But her eye was kindly.

"He did so till about two months ago. But there

has been some re-arrangement of hours, I believe," replied Cécile, quietly.

"Then you have met him before, I should think."

"Oh yes, several times."

Mrs. Haddock made no further remark, but seemed inclined to thought. Whatever course her mood might have taken, it was clear that her reflections were not sad, for a tender smile was playing upon her lip, and a certain aspect of satisfaction sat on her face. I have seen such a look in a woman's eye when she has been engaged in some little scheming of her own, and has met with success.

"So Geoffrey Lexley must be sent to the uncle for permission to join the picnic?" said Mr. Haddock, coming up a few minutes after this brief conversation had taken place. "We shall have him being sent on another errand, perhaps, shortly." Mrs. Haddock looked at her husband, and gave him one of those signals which only husbands understand. Bachelor readers will kindly take my word for it, he stayed his banter at once.

Cécile did not appear to have noticed the purport of her uncle's remark. "What do you think, uncle? Aunt had actually the boldness to invite him without asking my leave or yours, and yet she has no voice in our arrangements, has she?"

"None; it was an unpardonable impertinence. She is punished, however, for I forbade him to come."

"You did what?" cried his astonished partner. Cécile, too, stared at him.

"I strictly forbade him to come," reiterated the parson, as solemnly as if he were forbidding the banns themselves.

"I never heard of such a thing," said his wife, in a tone of disappointment. She almost looked cross.

"I could not encourage rebellion to constituted authority. Your daring to give him an invitation without consulting me revealed such a state of insubordination that I thought it necessary to do something decisive. I forbade him to come—unless——" Mr. Haddock paused.

"Yes, unless——?" urged his wife, with a troubled face.

"Unless he apologized first for having accepted your invitation," added the clergyman with all gravity.

"And he?" asked Mrs. Haddock.

"Did so in the most honourable and gentleman-like manner. I forgave him on the spot, and he is to come." Mrs. Haddock looked immensely relieved. As a pleasantry, she was quite prepared to join in the laugh. Had the thing been serious, I fancy the Rev. Joseph Redemptus Haddock would not have

found it possible to get an early sleep that night. A clergyman cannot always be in the pulpit, and have it all his own way. Perhaps that is why he is so dogmatic there. He is simply having it out theologically, the congregation being the sufferers.

I have said that Cécile did not appear to have noticed the purport of her uncle's pleasantry about the possibility of Geoffrey Lexley approaching him on another matter, after being referred to him by her. She had understood him to the full, but it had come like a flash upon her. It was the first time her eyes had been opened. It was full two hours before she went to bed that night. She sate at the open window of the little room; it was a sweet summer's night; and there she took council of the stars and of her own heart. Nevertheless, when she lay upon her bed, she fell into troubled sleep, and her dreams were melancholy in their cast.

CHAPTER III.

"Can a man, saith Solomon, carry fire in his bosom, and not burn? It will hardly be hid: though they do all they can to hide it, it must out."—DEMOCRITUS JUNIOR.

THE next morning dawned brightly, and so far everything was in favour of the trip to Garsington Abbey. Geoffrey having met Mr. Haddock in the earlier part of the preceding day, had added an extra hour or two to his work. After seeing Mr. Haddock, he had returned to the mill office, and there he completed certain correspondences that required immediate attention. He had seen the manager also, and all was arranged for his absence. No one had deserved a holiday better than he. He had neglected little of his customary work, and yet he had found time to watch at Johnnie's bedside by day as well as by night. Nevertheless, young and strong as he was, this had told upon him. He had a haggard and worn look, and it was with no small amount of rejoicing that the faithful manager, Mr. Barfoot, heard of his contemplated holiday.

"You should take a whole week somewhere, Mr. Geoffrey," he had said, somewhat anxiously.

"And neglect business?" responded Geoffrey.

"I would see that everything went right," urged Barfoot.

"I am sure you would. Perhaps in a few weeks I may do so. Till Johnnie is in his stool there" (pointing to a vacant seat which had never been removed) "I should have no heart for a holiday. I feel almost selfish in looking forward to this picnic."

Mr. Barfoot pleaded no more, but betook himself to his work. That Geoffrey was obstinate he had already found out; at any rate, on this subject he had proved stubborn, for it was not the first time he had been pressed to go away from home for a short time.

"I am so glad you have a fine day, Gipsy," said Johnnie, as his brother entered the room. And he looked from his bed through the window with a wistful glance, which told how much he would have enjoyed such a change himself.

"Johnnie, I feel so selfish. I know I ought to be with you whenever I can snatch any spare time from the mill, but I do want to go very much," said Geoffrey, and his lip quivered as he saw Johnnie looking at the sunshine.

"I should be perfectly miserable if I thought you

were to stay away. Besides, I am to go downstairs this afternoon. Think of that!" said the invalid, cheerily.

"And I have so often pictured that same thing to myself. I never thought that any one else but father and myself and mother should help you down. I always intended that it should be a great day in the house; I had almost made up my mind to let the mill hands have a holiday."

"We will tell you all about it when you come home, and then you shall tell us about the picnic. It will be a nice interchange of news," replied Johnnie, putting on his brightest air. He wanted Gipsy to have his full of enjoyment to-day. His brother's careworn face had not gone unnoticed by him. He had raised himself in bed at half-past two that same morning to see whether the dawn seemed hopeful, and at various intervals he had wakened with an eager start, so anxious was he for the success of the excursion.

Invalids who have had little else to do than watch countenances for many weeks are quick to read changes. Johnnie detected at a glance that there was an unwonted expression in his brother's face.

"Gipsy, you have something to tell me," he said.

"Yes, Johnnie," replied Geoffrey, bashfully.

"What is it?"

"Do you remember when we were children, and you were afraid to sleep alone, that one night I came to you, and you were so glad?"

"I shall never forget that night, and often bless God and you that you came."

"We said we would never be separated, and never keep a secret from each other."

"Yes."

"We are not children now, Johnnie."

"No."

Johnnie was troubled, he scarcely knew why; at least, he could not have said why.

"I often think of those words, 'When I was a child I spake as a child.'" Geoffrey stopped; his lip quivered.

"'But when I became a man I put away childish things,'" continued Johnnie, gently. "Yes, Gipsy, it must be so. And now, what is it?"

"When we were children, and talked thus, how little we knew of life!" Geoffrey seemed to be thinking rather than talking. "We imagined that we were never to grow any older, but be Gipsy and Johnnie as such till — till our allotted time was fulfilled." Again the words quavered. A tremor, too, seized Johnnie's lips.

"Yes, Gipsy, it was very nice. Innocence like that is God's peculiar gift to childhood."

"But it cannot go on. We cannot help becoming men."

"You have been Gipsy to me from that day to this." The invalid was not quite himself now. A moisture bedewed his eye, and one or two stray tears stole down his wasted cheek. Nevertheless, his heart was full of blessing upon his brother.

"I never thought to keep anything from you, but manhood has brought its secret with it."

"It must do so. I knew you had a secret," said Johnnie, quietly.

"You knew? You do not think me changed to you?"

"No; changed to yourself, but not to me. And so this secret means separation, Gipsy?" Johnnie tried to speak cheerily, but it was not a brilliant success.

"Partially. Oh, Johnnie, how is it that I love you so, and yet can brook separation? What joy and pain are intermingled in the same cup! Life seems made up of such opposite elements."

"It has been so from the beginning. 'Therefore shall a man leave his father and mother,' ay, and brother—even me, Gipsy—'and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh.' It is God's ordinance; and, Gipsy, may that same God bless you and Cécile." His hand slid from beneath the

coverlet, and he took his brother's in his own. What a thin, emaciated hand it was!

"Johnnie, how did you know this?" A deep glow was on Geoffrey's face.

"I have been studying you. I have had nothing else to do, you know." He smiled gently.

"I shall be afraid of you," said Geoffrey, laughing, but blushing much.

"You intend to speak to her to-day, Gipsy, do you not?" His brother nodded. "I am glad you came to me, lad; I thought you would. Tell her from me that I deliver up the most precious treasure of my life into her keeping. Tell her, too——" Johnnie paused; then, with an effort, he proceeded—"Tell her, too, that I can trust her with it. Go!" he said, almost sharply.

Geoffrey pressed his brother's hand, and then slowly went forth.

"Gipsy!"

"Yes." Geoffrey came back quickly, and bent over the sick one.

"I want to whisper something; I cannot say it aloud."

Geoffrey put his ear to Johnnie's lips.

"I am glad you are going to marry Cécile."

They were very close to one another. Somehow their lips met.

As Geoffrey went out, he looked round at his brother, and saw his face as it were the face of an angel. But it was not then that he knew whence such a spiritual illumination had been derived. The time did come, however, when his eyes were opened to understand this among other mysteries.

CHAPTER IV.

"Certainly the happiest part of a young man's life is the time when he is going a-courting."—CHARLES LAMB.

"AUNTIE, I think you had better go without me," said Cécile the next morning. She spoke with a strange diffidence, and yet she seemed thoroughly in earnest. Mrs. Haddock stared at her in astonishment, and then looked disquieted.

"You are not well, dear. Have you not slept?"

"Not very well, and my head aches. I think I have been too anxious for a fine day," she added, trying to laugh; but her eyes were red and swollen, and tears were ready to well forth.

"What is this I hear? Not going to the abbey? Nonsense!" said Uncle Joseph, coming forward and catching Cécile by the waist. "Let me look at you. Yes, I understand; not quite the thing this morning—slightly feverish, pulse somewhat high. Let me see your tongue, love. You did too much yesterday; that extra preparation for Geoffrey Lexley has fatigued

you. The additional expense, too, has weighed down your spirits; those healthy young fellows do eat so much. Never mind, just give me a signal when the provisions do not look like holding out, and I will drag him away."

These allusions did not seem to restore his niece's equanimity. "I think I had better stay at home, uncle."

"Tut, tut! nothing of the kind. I don't mind putting off the excursion, but go without you we cannot and will not. Why, we shall have the children in open rebellion."

Thus Cécile's determination was overruled. To postpone the picnic, she knew, was out of the question. They would never get such a fine day as this again. And as for Bobbie and the rest, when she thought of them she felt at once that things must be as they had been arranged, and she must go. Having come to this decision, she began to feel ashamed that she should have thrown the barest semblance of a damper on the day's enjoyment, especially at the outset; therefore she began in earnest to superintend the final packing of the hamper.

What a hamper it was! No Christmas hamper was ever half so big, and I doubt whether one was ever so closely and carefully packed. Bobbie, and Ally, and Georgie—nay, even baby—were brought to

look on. A white dimity cloth was set at the bottom, and upon that were stowed two quartern loaves and about a dozen crisp rolls. Then came a couple of boiled chickens, plump, skewered, and adorned with sundry sprigs of parsley. Georgie thought the skewers were to prevent them flying away, till Ally reminded him that the basket had a lid, and that a rope was to go round it. A small ham, the knuckle garnished with a little pink paper frill, came next —not unlike Cécile's collar, Bobbie suggested. Then a little parcel of salt, and another of tea, filled up the niches between the loaves. Then a dimity, spotless in its whiteness as the other had been, and a new tier began. A bottle of vinegar, and a cucumber, followed by a basket containing lettuces, radishes, small onions, and "shives," were safely stowed away. Then some four or five hard-boiled eggs were added; then a large pound cake, a lemon cake, and a parcel of biscuits. Next was inserted a largish piece of cheese. Besides all this, plates, knives, forks, spoons, tumblers, cups, saucers, a teapot, a stick of horseradish, some sugar, a corkscrew, a bottle of salad oil, and a bottle of claret, elbowed one another in the rudest and most insolent manner. How they managed not to break the peace, or, rather, break into pieces, the children could never tell. It is a fact, however, that, with the exception of a plate which

Bobbie smashed in trying to balance it upon his nose while nobody was looking, all these said several and "singular" articles, as the lawyers would say, found their way back again into the scullery and pantry upon that selfsame evening. I except, of course, the sugar, the horse-radish, and the salad oil. Nothing was ever seen of them after that day. Certainly Cécile had a genius for packing. As the lid was fastened down, and the rope secured firmly round the hamper, it was observed that Bobbie looked sad. It has been surmised—and it is the only satisfactory elucidation of the mystery—that for the space of sixty entire seconds that young and carnivorous animal wished that the waggonette might be countermanded, and the lunch begun—the little wretch!

The next sensation was the appearance of the waggonette. We shall retain this title, as did the Haddock family, throughout the day. Nevertheless, it was a curious and lumbering vehicle for a waggonette. Originally it had been a stage-coach, with four "insides"; now everybody was an outside, the top having been removed. The four central occupants sat low, the two behinds and the driver being elevated to a conspicuous position. The whole had a look of having seen better days, and there was no doubt it could not see many worse. In spite, too, of a free application of water, a suspicion hung over it

of its having been disused for some considerable period in the past. The wheels creaked awfully, the wood was cracked, and daylight was visible in several places where daylight is usually excluded. As it drew up, you perceived that this air of antiquity pervaded even the horses. One was piebald, the other grey: one had a bad cough, so dry and hard that at first you mistook it for the grating of the wheels; the other had a frightful stoop in the back, and hung down its head in a feeble and despondent manner that did not speak hopefully for the work which was to be required of it. The tails and manes of both were long and tangled. The driver was in strict keeping. His age might be anything between sixty-five and seventy-six; he was an apoplectic, drowsy-looking man, and a tendency to corpulency seemed to have finally settled in his neck. It was the stoutest and thickest neck you ever saw. To make things worse, he had at least four big coloured handkerchiefs round it. He had evidently made up his mind that it was to be the coldest day on record, for he had three coats on, the outermost being ornamented with two gilt buttons with a crest on. They were both on the lappet. All those in the neighbourhood of the neck were wanting, and as the button-holes were burst, the cause was manifest: all had given way under pressure from within.

"Hope we shan't ha' it rough," he said, whip in hand, touching his cap to the parson. "You'll ha' your wraps, maybe, inside."

"Why, you don't think there's going to be rain?" asked Mr. Haddock, looking up into the sky in astonishment.

"We mun hope not, o' coorse, nor snow neythur," answered the old man. What a travel-worn face he had, as he turned aside to examine the hoof of the grey horse! It seemed furrowed plough-deep.

Bobbie thought there had never been such a turn-out in Lackington before. He stared at the piebald horse's mane, and silently ran his hand though his hair; but, unkempt as it was, it would not do. Nothing in the way of hair could be so unruly as that piebald's mane. The hamper, as being of primary consequence, was treated with due respect, and put in first. It was honoured with the box-seat, too. Cécile and Bobbie sat behind; Mr. Haddock, his good lady, the three children, and the one servant, with her brand-new gown on, were the "insides"; and as they were to pick up Geoffrey at the Grange gate, it became a question where that gentleman was to be seated. But faith in compression is everything at a picnic; and with a "We can arrange somehow, you know," the word was given, and the sexagenarian Jehu, with an all-round flick

of the whip, which nearly took Bobbie's hat off, started the pair.

What a strange old man he seemed! As he raised his whip, he cried out in a most cheery manner, "Give her her head, Bill! There! off we go, and God send us a safe journey to Kendal!" Mr. Haddock looked round for the new-comer; but no, there was no one to be seen. Where on earth had Bill come from, and where had he gone?

"Eh, but they step out rarely, sir," said the old man, half bowing—he couldn't do more for his neck. Mr. Haddock of course assented, knowing nothing about "stepping out." But long before the day was over, he mentally resolved never to go out on a picnic with a pair of horses that "stepped out rarely." The fact was, the pair never stepped together at all, and thus a jolting sensation, as of a loaded cart going down a hill, was the consequence. It would have been the very thing for Mr. Emlott's circulation, but it was too late to ask him. But the children thought it splendid, and hurrahed till they were hoarse. The coachman looked gratified. He bent over and said, "Th' horses is reythur restive, sir; they won't stand too much on it." Mrs. Haddock got frightened upon this, and the children were silenced. It turned out afterwards that both the steeds were stone-deaf.

As in duty bound, Geoffrey was at the trysting-

place. At a glance it was discovered that with two such apoplectic box-passengers as Jehu and the hamper, a seat there was impossible. The "insides" were crowded. The thing was settled at once. Geoffrey sprang up behind, and took Bobbie between his legs, disregarding that young gentleman's suggestion that he, the young gentleman, could stand on the step and hold on by the side of the vehicle.

"Well, Geoffrey"—the parson had latterly dropped the "Mister"—"this looks propitious. Couldn't have fixed on a better day, could we?"

"Impossible! Johnnie was up at half-past two to see what kind of a morning it was going to be."

"Mr. Lexley up?" said Cécile, looking astonished.

"Only up in bed; but he's really to get up and come downstairs this afternoon. Dr. Garfitt says he thinks he should have been down several days ago, but father was so nervous and anxious that it has been deferred till now. He's wonderfully better."

"Thank God!" said the parson, fervently.

"There's nothing to mar our enjoyment, then," declared Mrs. Haddock.

"Unless the sermons are not quite finished," put in Cécile, mischievously.

"The sermons are completed, my dear; but I can still find time to change my texts, and preach a course of two on the respect due to uncles from their nieces, if you like."

The scenery through which our party drove, without the possession of unwonted charms, was sufficiently varied to maintain their admiration. Besides, sunshine and a high summer aided the landscape. There was not a flower by the hedgerow that Mrs. Haddock did not know, and she made a holiday lecture for the children as they went along. Occasionally they asked the driver to stop the horses, or the horses stopped without the asking, and then they all scrambled out, and gathered foxgloves, and ragged robins, and buttercups, and hedge roses. Then a steep ascent would come, and Geoffrey and Mr. Haddock and Bobbie walked behind and chatted with Cécile, who had to turn her head round till she had a "crick" in her neck. Then they would pause on the eminence they had scaled to take a more discursive view of the country; and while the children frolicked, the staider ones would admire the succession of woods, and corn-fields, and meadows, and the grazing cattle, and the men at work turning the hay in the nearer fields. A stream, too, could be seen wandering with sweet informality in and out of woodland cloughs and winding vales. Above them to the north was set a long range of lofty hills, with a lower tract of sombre woodlands between; and Mr. and Mrs. Haddock would go aside, and a solemnity would steal upon them, for the hills will ever throw the more

advanced in years back upon their youth and its cluster of memories, and then forward to that infinity upon whose border-land they seem to be standing. Then the whispered discourse would be over, and all would be young again ; and the children would grow sheer frantic with delight, as they drove slowly through rustic arcades of overhanging boughs, which met in pacific embrace in the middle of the road. How they snatched at the drooping arms ; how they seized the more blossomed stems ; how they watched with mad eagerness the branched foliage that lay pendant in front, which should grasp it first! Thus they went along, and every one was merry. Even Cécile's headache seemed passed away ; and, as passed away, no one thought to ask how she did ?

By-and-by they passed a hedge ; then a rural church with a low and massive tower, and grim corbels, so big and grotesque that Ally was frightened ; then they saw a turnpike gate in front, with a small cottage attached thereto ; and then—suddenly a loud blast was heard, and turning quickly to the box, what should be seen but the old driver with a horn to his mouth, and his cheeks swollen like a pair of bellows.

"I forgot to gi' it to Bill," he said, apologetically. "They's so 'tarnal slow at these turnpike nowadays. But they's like th' rest on 'em ; they thinks as these

railways'll stop th' coo-aches, and they can affoord to be imperent—drat 'em!"

"Ay, ay," said Mr. Haddock, inclined to humour the man, as he could not quite make him out.

"In course I knows better, but I lets 'em talk—drat 'em!"

"Ay, ay," said the parson.

"It's aw as I said, you see; we shall ha' to stop till th' ge-ates is oppened. Six months ago and she'd ha' had it wide; but she's like th' rest on 'em—drat 'em! I hope th' leddys is warm. I've a hextra rug i' th' box."

Mr. Haddock declined the extra rug with thanks. But for a balmy air which stirred the hedges and curled the leaves, they would have been stifled with the heat.

Meanwhile Geoffrey was very attentive to Cécile. He had forestalled her every need, as young men in like case with himself are so prone to do. He had twice helped her out of the waggonette, and as a consequence had twice helped her in again, and much bliss he seemed to have derived from his so doing. She, on her part, was unwontedly quiet, and it was plain to both Mr. and Mrs. Haddock that she was sensitive and nervous this morning. The former put it down to a bad night; the latter was not quite sure, but fell back upon an idea which she kept to herself.

But all journeys have an end, and so it was that by-and-by the grey tower of Garsington Abbey came in sight.

The hamper was next unfastened, and everybody was everybody's servant. A large tablecloth was laid upon the turf. Bobbie and Ally set the knives and forks, and Georgie the spoons. The clergyman brought out the large dishes, such as the ham, the chickens, and the loaves, while Geoffrey must needs help Cécile in cutting the lettuces and cucumbers, chopping the eggs, and dressing the salad. To Mrs. Haddock was deputed, by general consent, the task of making up all the wild flowers they had gathered into a bouquet, and this was placed as a central ornament, being propped up on one side by the salad-oil bottle, and on the other by a set of castors.

A jug of water was fetched from the well—water so clear and sparkling that it was enough to turn anybody into a teetotaler. Nevertheless, the claret was uncorked for the elders. What a meal it was! Mr. and Mrs. Haddock sat on the stump of a felled tree, the rest reclined on the greensward.

The old coachman was a marvel. His seat was a small boulder, some five yards away. Before he began those feats that begot such wonderment from the spectators, he took off his wrappers, one after the other, very deliberately, and then divested himself of

his uppermost coat. When a fork was brought to him he stared at it for a moment, and then carefully wrapt it in a piece of paper and laid it on one side. With his right hand he firmly grasped the kitchen knife, and then he began. In the course of several minutes he had consumed half of one of the quartern loaves, three large platefuls of ham, and three-quarters of an immense cucumber, which he cut off, block by block, against his thumb. He never took breath himself, but he made up for it by taking away the breath of his beholders. With a reckless skill that would have done credit to an Indian juggler performing the sword dance, he plunged the knife into his mouth, sometimes, it seemed, into his very throat, and yet nothing came of it; he never reeled nor fell. As he had refused a fork, so he disdained a tumbler, and drank his beer—brought from the inn—from the jug.

By-and-by an idea struck him. He got up and began to look in his coat,—first the capacious side-pockets, then the breast-pocket, and then he plunged his hand into a large poke that ran down the inner side of his left lappet. Thence he drew a newspaper, and laid it out, all four sides. Upon this he set a huge wedge of cheese, then some ham; then, after surveying it reflectively some moments, the remaining quarter of the cucumber; lastly, nearly half a loaf; and all these he wrapped into a parcel. It was observable,

too, that at this time he drank more carefully, peering steadily into the jug after every pull at the beer, as if performing some mental calculation.

"I can send for some more, if that is not enough," said the parson, coming to him.

"Thank you kindly, sir; but it's not that." He spoke with a somewhat abstracted, not to say dejected, air. "I was thinking I might leave a sup i' case Bill came. There's no telling but what he might chance to turn up, you know." He looked eagerly at Mr. Haddock.

"Of course he might," said the parson cheerily.

The old man's face brightened for a moment, and then the gloom returned. "I'll tell you what it is," he whispered—"I've been a-thinking of it over as I've been eating; and if I've not done that justice to th' ham and cheese, and especially, I may say, to that cowcumber, as you might ha' given me credit for, perhaps you'll lay it at th' door o' what I'm going to say. Bill's not the man that he was; he's started o' shirking his work.'"

"I'm sorry for that," said Mr. Haddock.

"Ay, you may well say so. 'Tis he as ought to ha' blowed that horn. There's summat wrong, depend on't." He looked at Mr. Haddock despondently.

"Is Bill the guard?"

"No, he isn't; but he was. There's where the p'int lies. It looks as if he'd guv it up, doesn't it now? And yet him and me's bin on th' ro-ad twenty-three ye-ar, fro' Lancaster to Kendal, and fro' Kendal to Lancaster. Eh, but it's bin a rough ride o' some neets—dark as pitch, and snowed up, too, i' winter toime. I s'udna like to think as Bill's shirked it. 'Tain't like Bill, is that."

"Perhaps Bill couldn't come to-day," suggested the parson kindly.

"He used as he could allus coom up to time. There's whe-ar it is, yo see. To think as I had to blow th' horn! Oh, dear me! dear me! it's a change-ful world!" He buried his face in the jug, perhaps to hide a tear; when he emerged again he gasped for breath. "Him and me's never had an ill word for twenty-three ye-ar! They try to make out as he's gone on the railro-ad; but I'll never believe that o' Bill. I'se stuck to him more nor twenty ye-ar, and I'll no believe ill on him now."

The old man got up, enveloped his neck in his wrappers one by one, donned his extra outside coat, and touched his hat as he passed the party.

"You needna be anxious," he said, somewhat more cheerily than he had spoken to Mr. Haddock; "we s'al ha' a fine night yet. You mun try and make six insides; and I've a extry rug or two under

th' box-seat. I've knowed it sleet so as I couldn't see my big finger three inches off, and so cold you might ha' sawed it off by the middle j'int, and I s'ud never ha' known it, I was so numbed like. But I've hopes, yet, as it'll be warmer towards evening." He passed on to the inn, and they saw him no more till it was time to return home.

Almost all picnics are the same. Whether wet or fine, they are enjoyable; like their fellows, too, they invariably come to an end. The time flew by very quickly, and when the word for preparing to return was given, it seemed as if the day had gone with most unwelcome speed. A cup of tea at the inn, in a well-scoured and sanded room, with country butter, cream, and cakes by way of extras, took up but a few minutes, and as the evening began to prevail, the waggonette was drawn up to the door. The hamper was once more located by the driver, and this time Bobbie's intreaties were allowed success. Somehow or other, Mrs. Haddock did not seem so sensitive as mothers are wont to be on the subject of accidents. With one or two injunctions that he should be cautious not to fall out, or overturn the basket, he was mounted in triumph beside the coachman. In all other respects the position of the party was unchanged. The "insides" of the morning were again the "insides," and Cécile and Geoffrey, as before, sat behind. It is

curious how private those back seats may be made to be, especially if those in front are inclined to be noisy or self-absorbed. On the way home both Mr. and Mrs. Haddock talked somewhat demonstratively, and were mightily engrossed with themselves and their children. There might have been no back seat to the carriage, nor two other members of the party, so far as they were concerned, for they never once seemed to direct their attention that way. These unaccountable incidents may be observed on other occasions than the return journey from a picnic. One gets suspicious at times that there may be a motive for it; but, then, one can, if so disposed, get up a suspicion about anything. Besides, both Mr. and Mrs. Haddock were growing into years; and never were two people to look at so unlikely to engage in a plot.

In such security did Geoffrey give vent to his passionate admiration for Cécile.

"I think Bobbie would have been safer with me," said Cécile. "The coachman seems such a queer old man."

"He would never have been happy if he had not had the box-seat," rejoined Geoffrey, with a certain sympathy for Bobbie in his tone. "What a charming day we have had! How much I shall have to tell Johnnie when I get back!"

"I think all invalids become very curious," rejoined Cécile. "It is so difficult to know what the world is doing in the sick chamber, even the little world of their own domestic interests."

"And yet there is little to tell that Johnnie has not been made acquainted with. By-the-by, I must tell you that, when he first recovered, he seemed so anxious to know how you were all going on at the rectory, and whether you had got over your fright. One would have imagined that it was you that was in peril, not he."

"It was very kind of him," murmured his companion.

"I think he knew that such a concern would be warmly appreciated by me," said Geoffrey hotly.

Cécile Marnott made no reply.

"You must know—you cannot be ignorant, Cécile—how dear is your welfare to me. If anything had happened to you on that afternoon, I should never have been happy again, I think."

Still his companion said never a word.

"You know that I love you better than life itself." Geoffrey took her hand in his; Cécile tried to withdraw it. "You know that, don't you, Cécile?"

"I have suspected it—lately—that is, last night; but—but—oh, Mr. Geoffrey, let us forget you have said this."

"Forget! How can you bid me forget?" he whispered. "You will be my wife, Cécile, darling?"

"No, no; I cannot, I must not," said Cécile, hurriedly. "Oh, I am so sorry; I am sure it is my fault."

"Certainly it is your fault that I love you, if to be so beautiful and gentle is your fault," said Geoffrey, trying to regain her hand.

"I did not mean that. I am afraid I have encouraged—I mean I did not know till last night," replied Cécile, somewhat disconnectedly. She was sadly confused.

"Know what?"

"That you—meant what you have said." Cécile seemed in dire agitation.

"But now that you do know, you will be mine? I have loved you ever since I saw you—since the party at Mrs. Bland's, I am sure."

"No, no. Oh, please let us talk about something else," said Cécile, tears which she could not repress falling down her cheeks.

"I will not press you now, if it agitates you. I had hoped to have told Johnnie bright news to-night."

"Mr. Lexley does not know?" said Cécile, quickly.

"Oh yes, I told him this morning; but he had guessed it all along, and he said he was so glad about it. I think he expected—I am sure that he

hoped—you would say yes," added Geoffrey, with a crestfallen tone. If the truth must be confessed, he had thought for a different reception to his suit. A certain bashfulness he had looked for and desired —what lover does not? But Geoffrey Lexley had not met hitherto with many disappointments in life, and if aspiration in this matter of his love had become anticipatory, it was less a belief in his own personal attractions than a falling back upon past experience. There are men who deem that no woman can withstand their charms. Geoffrey was not of this class; but it is quite possible that the relative position of the two had had its effect upon his mind. Cécile was poor, he was rich; Cécile was a governess, he was a manufacturer; Cécile had to pass much of her life in acts of drudgery, he could offer her ease and luxury. Thoughts like these it would be vain to imagine had not passed through Geoffrey's brain.

It was well for Cécile, and, indeed, for Geoffrey also, that the journey was nearly over. There is, perhaps, no moment when a girl is so desirous to be quit of a man as that which ensues upon a rejection or acceptance of her lover's proposal. If she rejects him, conversation becomes painfully awkward, and the man, if he is a man, will go for her sake, if not his own. If she accepts him, she longs to get

alone to realize that which as yet is a confused joy—she wants to think herself out of her bewilderment of bliss. Cécile had refused Geoffrey for a husband, and yet there was no escape for her. There the two sat, on the rear seat of the vehicle, the gentleman's right arm of very necessity being in contact with her left. The only course for her was to ally herself with the "insides," and to this end she bent forward and made a remark to Mrs. Haddock. From that moment the chatter became general, and the difficulty of a further *tête-à-tête* conversation with Geoffrey Lexley was thus removed. Nevertheless, Cécile was very glad when the horses stopped at the parsonage door.

A little girl was waiting. She had come for "Jos." Jos, it seemed, was the coachman.

"Is Jos the regular driver at the Grewby Arms?" asked Mr. Haddock.

"No; he's only put on when they're short o' a hand. Th' railway has killed him, you know."

"The railway killed him? What do you mean?"

"I don't know; mother allus says th' railway killed him. He's done nowt for six months nor more. He used to drive th' coach as started o' Tuesdays and Fridays on th' northern road. Eh, he tells Tom, and Sarah Ann, and Nancy, and me, such stories, does Jos, 'bout being caught in th'

snow, and th' coach being upset, and robbers attacking 'em—don't you, Jos?" she said, as she got up beside the old man.

"Maybe, maybe," he replied in a dejected tone. He took the reins, and, as he turned the horses round, whispered to Mr. Haddock, "I won't think no ill o' Bill, but it wur him as s'ud ha' blowed that horn!"

CHAPTER V.

"And for this disease in particular 'there can be no better cure than continual business,' as Rhasis holds, 'to have some employment or other, which may set their minds awork, and distract their cogitations.'"—DEMOCRITUS JUNIOR.

ABOUT twelve o'clock on that same day Johnnie came downstairs. Jane and her father stood at either side, and he rested a hand on the shoulder of each. They had determined that, in a small way, this should be a day of rejoicing at the Grange. The summer sun that was shedding such an increase of joy over the party at the abbey darted many a bright and cheering beam into the breakfast-room, and the invalid seemed wonderfully revived, although he was so quiet. For strangely quiet he was, and to the elder ones it was a quietness that rather frightened them. A quietude like this is so often the precursor of death; the frame has lost its energy, the life its force, and nature is showing herself to be spent. But, after a while, even his spirits seemed to gather strength, and their own

were refreshed with his. It was curious to watch his eye stealing over objects that, after so long a sojourn in his bedroom, appeared to him all but unfamiliar. It was like the recovery of knowledge that had been lost, or the recognition of a forgotten face. The fact of their existence had become obscure to him, and a mental effort was necessary to make their presence natural again.

"What a beautiful day it is!" he said, getting up and walking, feebly, it must be confessed, to the open window. "How I should like to be out of doors!"

"I almost think you might. What do you say, father?" asked Jane. They were just sitting down to dinner—early to-day on Johnnie's account.

"If Dr. Garfitt would not object; but I rather fancy he would approve of it. He thinks Johnnie has been kept upstairs too long already. What do you say to a short drive?"

"The very thing!" said Johnnie, brightening. "We will go as far as the church. That could not fatigue me; and if it did, I could be back again in five minutes."

"Would it not shake you too much?" asked Jane, doubtfully.

"I think not. You will both go, will you not?"

"Yes, dear. I suppose you do not think of

attending service; you would be too wearied for that." Jane could not quite shake off her prejudices even now.

"The afternoon prayers will be over at a quarter to four, and we will go after that. We can sit in the yard, under that big yew tree, and I will tell you all about the Lexleys from the year of grace 1390. You are not half up in the histories and traditions of the family. I must enlighten your dull understandings with a relation of certain events that brought us into the prominent place we occupied in those and later days." Johnnie was quite mirthful since the plan of a drive had been suggested.

"I hope Ebenezer will not be angry," said Jane. "But I do not see how he can be. The churchyard is so pretty at this time of the year, and the distance is so short."

The mention of his brother-in-law's name seemed to have a strange effect on Ralph. A deep flush overspread his face, and he looked apprehensively at the door.

When the afternoon was advanced, the little pony carriage was brought up to the porch, and Johnnie was helped in. Mr. Lexley drove, and Jane sat opposite to Johnnie, with a shawl to cover his knees. But even this pretence of carefulness was abandoned in a few minutes. The day was so fair, the air so

balmy, the lane so sweet with a hundred fragrances, that it seemed like a despite done to Nature's best medicines to fall back upon human precaution; and when the churchyard gate was reached—they had to take the circuitous route to escape the steep descent—the invalid boldly rebelled against all restraint, rejected his father's proffered aid, and sprang lightly down upon the soft and velvety sward.

"Eh, Mester Johnnie, be that you?" cried a voice, and in another moment Isaac appeared from the other side the thick arches of yew. What a strange mixture of gladness and sorrow there was in his face as he came forward!

"Isaac! Why, this completes my happiness. We can get to work at once."

"What work? Oh, Johnnie, be careful! Remember, this is your first day downstairs, as well as out of doors," said his stepmother, anxiously. "Mr. Curling would be sorry for you to misspend your little strength just when you are so much better."

"Don't fear for me, mother," replied the invalid, cheerily. "I only want to take a sketch."

"Where are your materials?" said his father.

"I've provided for that," rejoined Johnnie, laughing at his own secrecy; and, true enough, out of his thin overcoat he drew forth some paper. A little box of pencils, too, was exhibited. "You and mother can

make yourselves comfortable here, while I and Isaac go into the church. We shall not be more than ten minutes or a quarter of an hour. Never fear for me," he added, as he and the genealogist walked towards the entrance under the tower.

He looked so well and bright that neither Mr. nor Mrs. Lexley could offer any objection, and they betook themselves to the yew-tree seat till he should return. Jane had not been inside the church more than half a dozen times in her life, and even Ralph showed no disposition to enter the sanctuary, over the chancel of which hung the escutcheon of his family, and below whose aisle lay the crumbled and crumbling bones of his forefathers.

CHAPTER VI.

"I have a mind to buy enough ground to build a coach-house and stable; for I have had it much in my thoughts lately that it is not too much for me now in degree or cost to keep a coach, but contrarily, that I am almost ashamed to be seen in a hackney."—PEPYS'S *Diary*.

THE carriage, the horses, the harness, and even the physic came, and Mr. Emlott was supremely happy. They arrived about six in the evening, and on the following day the owner discovered that he had business four miles away which required his immediate attention. As he sat over his breakfast his face by changes displayed uneasiness and satisfaction, the latter prevailing to a remarkable extent whenever Tomkins was out of the room. Then he would put down his cup, thrust his chair back, clasp his hands upon his knees, and relieve himself of a huge and prolonged chuckle. When that gentleman returned he again lapsed into an awkward and constrained deportment. It was evident he had something to say, but was afraid to say it.

"Mr. Tomk—I mean Tomkins, I am sorry to say—in fact, it is a great nuisance, but I am afraid I shall not be in for lunch to-day."

"Very well, sir."

"Mebbe I could be back by two o'clock. It's only to Garstone—a little matter o' business."

"Perhaps I had better leave the lunch on the table, sir?" said the footman, bowing; he always bowed when he spoke.

"Yes, it will be as well," replied Ebenezer, trying to speak easily.

"Is there any parcel to go to the station, sir?" A bow.

"No, I think not, thank you. By the way, has that carridge come?"

"The landau? — oh yes, last night about six o'clock, sir. I thought you knew. I beg pardon, sir."

Landau — that was the name of the species, was it? "Yes, I think I did hear something about it, but I've bin so busy attending to other matters, they've put everything out o' my head. I'd better see what it's like. You can give orders to send it round to the front door; I'll drive to Garstone."

"Yes, sir; certainly, sir." Two bows.

Ebenezer went on with his breakfast, spilling a third of a cup of tea, his hand shook so. Tomkins

was behind him at the sideboard; he felt sure he was laughing at him.

But the great trial was to come. Mr. Emlott had not merely to walk through the lobby and down the steps, but he had to get into the landau and seat himself, and look at his ease till he had turned the corner of the street. Not till then could he give vent to his happiness; not till then could he be certain that Tomkins's eye would not be upon him. The carriage "came round." The phrase had pleased the manufacturer. He was not sure where he had heard it, but he felt certain it had told with his footman. There, he was confident, he had made no mistake. What a long time he was getting his arms into his light overcoat! How his legs gave way at the knee-joint as he walked through the passage! What a tendency he had to knock his shoulders against the side walls! He nearly fell headlong down the steps, and barked his left shin dreadfully in making two futile efforts to plant his foot on the landau step. But he was seated at last. His coachman, with his hand to his hat, asked the direction, and Ebenezer leant back. Oh, for another chuckle! Oh, to give one long vent to all this suppressed and fast-accumulating exultation! And yet, in the mean time, how miserable he was! He could not see Tomkins—where was he? Perhaps he was in the

cellar, or the scullery, or the kitchen. He dared not hope it. If he could only be sure that he was not at the breakfast-room window!

The carriage started, and Ebenezer looked for one brief moment at the dreaded spot. There stood Tomkins, rubbing a wine glass with a towel—rubbing it so carefully. There was a quiet smirk on his face. He caught his master's eye, and bowed. That bow finished the manufacturer. He did not know what on earth to do with his hands, but laid them sprawling, one upon each knee. He tried to keep his head well up, but his back cringed forward. He looked like a man about to be photographed, who has never been photographed before—only photography was not to the fore then.

"How I hate that fellow!" he groaned to himself.

But the street corner came at last, and then his triumph began. The people he met to a man, to a woman, to a child, stopped and stared, and he did not mind them staring at all. He passed the town offices, and one or two subordinate officials, after a brief pause, touched their hats to him. Then Philip's dog at the tanyard barked savagely; but this only drew attention, and he was grateful for such canine instinct. His satisfaction increased every instant. He felt as if he were leading off a large procession —a procession such as royalty makes, when the

retinue follows respectfully in the rear, and all eyes are fixed on the occupant of the first carriage. The retinue is nothing to the populace, but it gives effect to the scene. Three boys began a somewhat feeble cheer at the lane-end, and one followed hard in the rear to get a ride behind.

"Whip behind!" cried the other two. The coachman disdained the suggestion.

Ebenezer got excited. "Coachman, hadn't you—wouldn't it be advisable to whip behind? There's a lad hanging on."

"They're only gammoning, sir. I've drove a carridge afore to-day."

The snub was severe. Parkinson wished to remind his master that this was his first drive. His master subsided. But by-and-by the manufacturer got hot and restive again. "I'm sure there's a lad hanging on behind, Mr.—that is, Parkinson. He's weighing down the landau dreadful. It'll break!"

"What'll break?" Parkinson had not the manners of Tomkins.

"The—the landau, you know. They're brittle things, arn't they?"

"Of coorse. It's the main property o' leather, like glass, to be brittle. There's no 'lasticity i' leather, is there?" The sarcasm told. Another subsidence, and then Ebenezer was again miserable.

"Get away, you young rascal; I see you!" he cried in a thick loud voice. Nobody stirred.

"I'll give you into the hands o' that policeman there." Nobody seemed to care for the policeman, for nobody dropped off the vehicle.

"Policeman, just take this impudent young dog into custody." The young dog was evidently accustomed to imaginary policemen. He still hung on, so far as Ebenezer could judge. The manufacturer waxed wrathful. He got up, and peered over the top of the carriage, which was thrown back; but he was nearly jerked off in the effort, and he could not see sufficiently beneath. "Parkinson, I won't stand this no longer; either this carriage is mine or that lad's. I leave you to judge."

"It's yourn, o' coorse, sir," said the coachman, blandly. "Leastways, you've got to pay for it; you ordered it."

"Then that lad must come off. He's riding on th' shaft. I can hear him scatching th' paint. Whip behind!—do you hear?—whip behind!"

"Sartinly, sir." Parkinson was cross, and smote the thong hard upon the panel behind.

"Again," said Ebenezer. Parkinson did it again, and a third time.

"Don't you hear him squeaking, sir?" he asked, sarcastically.

"P'raps he's not there, after all," said Ebenezer, immensely relieved. "There's no harm done, I dare say."

"It'll want new polishing, that's all," replied the Jehu, in a decided tone.

"New polishing, and out for the first time to-day! What do you mean?" questioned the manufacturer, lapsing into alarm again.

"Whipping behind do score th' varnish dreadful, there ben't no mistake about that, unless you can catch th' lad round the neck, or over the back, when th' skin comes off i'stead."

"Why didn't you?—how stupid! How dare you spoil my carriage, sir? Stop the horses!" But just then, who should he see but the owner of Grewby Park standing by his lodge gate. The old gentleman stared at the approaching landau in wonderment.

"Who's this?" he said to Mrs. Banyer. The widow put her hand against the sun, and glanced down the lane.

"It do look like Mester Emlott, as is Mr. Lexley's brother-in-law," she replied.

"What, Mr. Ebenezer Emlott, the occupant of the mill down by Glapton Road?"

"Ay, that's him, sir. But what he's doing i' that carridge, or where he's getten it, I can't say nohow."

"I will speak to him; I want to see him. Mr.

Emlott, I believe?" he said with a courtly bow, as the coachman, obedient to his beckoning hand, drew up at the side of the path.

"Mr. Grewby! I hope you are well, sir?" replied Ebenezer, greatly flattered. "I'm sure I'm proud to make your acquaintance." ("The best stroke o' business I ever did i' my life, buying this carridge," he added to himself. "What a long way a bit o' a show do go wi' these quality people!")

"A few gentlemen are coming to dine with me to-night, ostensibly to talk over this new idea of a Mechanics' Institute. I am sure that those should have a voice in this matter who by their energy and industry have helped so materially to the increase of the prosperity, and I may add, I believe, the population, of the town. I am right, I surmise, when I say that this new scheme is specially intended for men of the very class you employ?"

"Exactly, sir; quite right, sir," replied Ebenezer, in a flutter.

"May I hope, then, if you have no other engagement——"

"Oh, I've no other engagement," broke in the manufacturer quickly.

"I am glad to hear it. Then I may look forward to the pleasure of seeing you this evening. We dine at seven."

"I shall esteem it an honour to be present."

This was not bad, this reply; Ebenezer dwelt on it during the rest of the drive. Like all other men of his class of mind, and at his stage of worldly advancement, spontaneity had nothing to do with conversation; to say 'the proper thing' embraced all the rules and principles of discourse, that is, in society. If Ebenezer was wrathful with one of his *employés*, it was marvellous what a turn for spontaneity he had; so natural was the ebullition of feeling, that indeed I am afraid Zion would have held, had it heard his sayings, that, from the chapel point of view, at least, they were not quite 'the proper thing.'

Ebenezer Emlott could do nothing that afternoon. He had scarcely done anything at Garstone. He had not made a very great bargain—not one, at any rate, to do credit to a man who had made such a rapid advance towards opulency as he was supposed to have done. A most unusual thing with him, he had been thinking of another matter, even while drawing up a business contract. That other matter was the invitation to dinner at Grewby Park. Even the landau and the crest were forgotten in this so much greater event. That he would have given his coachman a month's wages to get down from the carriage, and retire a hundred yards while he might give vent to one prodigious chuckle, no one

who could have read his feelings just then would have for one moment doubted. But he repaid himself when he reached home. Arrived there, he betook himself to his bedroom, locked the door, and for the space of one hour was supremely happy. Never had he been so happy in the course of his life. Never had the summit of that steep hill he had been climbing so patiently and so long seemed so near. His carriage and his crest had done it; and, oh, how cheap did that purchase appear! He had sent a cheque for the full amount that afternoon, and never had he delivered up his money so cheerfully. Had the price been double it would have gone without a murmur.

With all his love for port wine, he was a great believer in tea, and he determined he would have a cup before he started. It would brace him up for that which lay before him. It was Ben's tea time also, and he was to go back to the mill afterwards. For the first time since Tomkins had come to the house, Ebenezer eyed him with a superior glance. He gave his orders loudly, and stared insolently at his dependent as he gave them.

"Another cup, Ben? That's right; young men should always take plenty of tea—it's a sign of good morals. Come, look sharp, Tomkins, or Timkins, or whatever your name is; we must not keep a young

fellow waiting when it's tea as he wants. It's a hindrance to his moral welfare, as I take it."

"Certainly, sir." Tomkins presented Ben's cup with a bow.

"Tell Parkinson to have the landau round at 6.30, sharp," said the master of the house, still in a loud and imperious tone.

"Yes, sir; certainly, sir."

"6.30, mind. He knows where I'm going—he heard it," rejoined Ebenezer, with an ill-suppressed voice of triumph. To be strictly correct, there was no attempt at suppression.

"Yes, sir." Tomkins was calm and obsequious; not a muscle moved that was not wont to move.

"I'm so glad you're going, uncle," said Ben.

"So am I, lad. I don't mind saying so far as that it's a honour as any man might be proud on, even though he hadna a pair of calves, and silk whiskers to match." And the manufacturer stared Tomkins out of countenance—if it were possible; but the issue proved he could not.

The footman went on with his duties. A smooth smile played for one instant over his lips. With an almost noiseless step, he tended to the wants of his two superiors. Had he trodden the path of life hitherto on velvet, he could not have come and gone more imperceptibly. His bows increased with the

greater insolence of his master's commands; his suave manner grew the less impaired as Ebenezer's language waxed the more coarse. Ben went away to his work.

"Tell Parkinson I must be at Grewby House at two minutes to seven, exact. The great thing at a dinner is neither to be too soon nor too late. I suppose you know that?"

"Yes, sir. You'll not be taking asparagus, I presume, sir?"

For a moment Ebenezer stood looking at his footman in blank astonishment, and then, before his stealthy eye, his countenance fell. "What do you—I don't quite comprehend," he said, with an ill assumption of composure.

"Quite right, sir. It's all right. I thought it might be best to mention it. Shall I hand you the toast, sir?"

The victory was complete. Ebenezer writhed as a trodden worm writhes, and then succumbed. Again his neck lay under the iron heel of the man in plush. He groaned in spirit, and for the hundredth time asked himself how it came to pass that he, a free man and a rich, should be burdened with such a yoke as this? How was it that, so galled as he was, he could not throw it off? "You'll not be taking asparagus, sir?" He would make a fool of himself

at this dinner by his gaucheries—this was what Tomkins meant. And how on earth was he to know whether he would do so or not? If he did not know how to go about the consumption of asparagus as society demanded he should go about it, how could he be assured that he would swallow any select dish as it ought to be swallowed? In the glories of the invitation he had forgotten its perils. He looked at Tomkins with an eye of entreaty, as though to ask him what he should do. But that gentleman left the room. With a quaking and apprehensive heart Mr. Emlott entered his carriage: with the words still echoing in his ear, "You'll not be taking asparagus, sir?" he drew up at the house. The owl had boded evil. Tomkins was the seer, and he had prophesied ill.

Parkinson knew his duty. At the right moment he was at the journey's end, and before the gong sounded Mr. Emlott had been introduced to those whom he had not met before, and been shaken by the hand of those with whom he had an acquaintance. But his spirits had been already shaken, and, unlike his hand, would persist in going on with the operation. Thus troubled in mind, body, and estate, he entered the dining-room, scarcely aware that the frail and dependent being in flounced muslin who weighed gently upon his arm was none other than Mrs. Bland.

It was a bachelors' dinner, and a business dinner; nevertheless Mr. Grewby had invited some three or four ladies to add a little grace to the proceedings. He was an old man and a genial gentleman; and the wife of a neighbouring squire—the squire himself being of the party—undertook the part of "lady of the house."

"A positive pleasure, I'm sure," murmured Mrs. Bland.

"Of course it is," rejoined Ebenezer, who did not know what he was saying.

"Beautifully-arranged table; those flowers are perfectly charming. I do so dote on flowers, Mr. Emlott—don't you?"

"Certainly, ma'am. I may say as I've allus made it a p'int o' duty to do so. I was most correctly brought up, I was—allus reminded as they was here to-day and gone to-morrer." Ebenezer looked solemn: habit was strong upon him.

"Ah, Mr. Emlott, what a blessing to have had judicious parents! You are to be envied." The widow sighed as though she were reflecting how different things might have been with her under a careful training.

Soup intervened.

It was evident that the precise purpose for which the gentlemen had come together was not to be

named till the ladies were gone. Thus the conversation fell, as is customary, into little knots; and, to Ebenezer's relief, he found that, if he wished, it was quite possible for him to maintain a *tête-à-tête* discourse with his partner. The thought visibly restored him. He had intended to eat very sparingly, as 'the proper thing,' and with that feeling felt by every *parvenu*, that the eye of the whole company is upon himself especially; but appetite was strong upon him, and the example set by several neighbouring squires, not to say Mrs. Bland herself, soon determined him to change his resolve. He attacked everything heartily, and each moment saw his spirits more recovered and himself more at home.

"Not bad sherry, this; but nothing to your port, Mrs. Bland." This was whispered rather than said.

"Your appreciation of my wine, Mr. Emlott, is the most pleasing reminiscence of my little party. My late husband—I use the word in its conventional sense—he has been dead some considerable time now, and Time, you know—— I was going to say that my late husband was very particular about the wine he drank—excessively so. Thus learning to cultivate his wishes, I came to acquire his tastes. Bad wine I consider an inexcusable fault—quite irredeemable."

"I have the best port in Lackington, ma'am," Ebenezer whispered decisively in his partner's ear.

"Don't whisper, Mr. Emlott; it looks rather too —too—you know what I mean—confidential." She smiled sweetly upon him, nevertheless.

"Beg pardon, ma'am, I'm sure; supremely happy, that's my excuse." If a porpoise were ever sentimental, it must have looked something like Ebenezer as he said this.

"You're so complimentary, Mr. Emlott, I shall become quite afraid of you. Ah, you men who see so much of society——" She stopped and worked her fan. Her wrist-play was perfect, and allowed her action rather than her words to signify how extremely dangerous were men of Mr. Emlott's standing in the world to the peace of the female mind in general, and to the occupant of Westbourne Villa in particular.

Thus encouraged, there is no telling what the manufacturer might not have done and said; but he was appealed to just then by Mr. Skillicorne across the table—for, to his disgust, that gentleman also was present—and a heavy joint and an *entrée* or two occupied his attention afterwards.

"I trust your nephew is quite recovered from the effects of his noble endeavour to save Miss Marnott's life?" said Mrs. Bland, by-and-by.

"Yes. Johnnie's out now; leastways, he was out yesterday," replied Ebenezer, indifferently.

"So disinterested, you know; only a governess."

"Quite so—a mere governess—what's that for position?" The manufacturer looked contemptuous. He would have snapped his fingers had he been anywhere else.

"Besides, I am not quite sure—do not mistake me, I would not hint an uncharitable reflection for the world—but I am bound to say I am not quite sure that Miss Marnott is not deceitful."

"I don't know about that; but she's trying hard to catch a husband in the shape of Geoffrey—my nephew, you know."

"Oh, Mr. Emlott, so you also have noticed it? I never see that girl but I blush for my sex—never. You must excuse my speaking strongly, but I am a woman, with a woman's feelings. I have longed and longed to whisper a word of caution to some member of the family, or better than that, yourself—for I know how precious is the well-being of your nephews in your eyes. Mr. Emlott, unless you are careful, Mr. Geoffrey will be lost, utterly lost. There is nothing so distasteful to me as mixing even in appearance in other people's affairs, but Miss Marnott is governess in my house, and I must own to being strangely interested in the Lexleys. They are such fine, noble, ingenuous young men—men of that class who, unsuspicious themselves, fall into the snares that are laid for them on that very account. But

I shall be more comfortable now I know that your quick eye has discovered what has been going on for so many weeks. I feel as if some heavy weight of responsibility had been removed from my shoulders —I do indeed. Oh, how I long to tell Maria! Dear Maria, she has been almost as anxious as myself; she is so sensitive to anything that reflects upon the character of her sex."

"Miss Maria is a fine young wo—lady; I'm always saying so to Ben."

"I am glad that you have learnt her worth. Poor child, she feels so keenly Mr. John's accident; a spectator, as one might say, of the whole affair, and her nerves so delicately strung. I thought I should have had to take her to the seaside—I did indeed."

"Ay, poor lad, poor lad!" said Ebenezer. There was something significant in his tone.

"Yes; but he is better, you say?" rejoined the lady, looking at him.

"Ay, better one way; but—ah! well, poor lad, it'll have to come." The manufacturer shook his head.

"There's nothing wrong, I trust, with Mr. John? Maria and I are so fond of him, it really would distress us beyond measure if there was anything seriously amiss."

"It's all amiss—that's what it is!"

"Your confidence would be sacred, if you thought it would ease you to unburthen yourself to one so attached to the family as myself." Mrs. Bland was curious, as all women are. But she was anxious also. She and Maria were to call at the Grange to-morrow to congratulate Johnnie on his recovery. Mr. Emlott seemed to allude vaguely to some evil worse than a mere accident to the body. It might be advisable to leave Maria behind, and present her daughter's gratulations with her own.

"It's all amiss—that's what it is. If it had been Johnnie as had got fond o' this governess it wouldn't ha' mattered so much."

"But you forget Mr. John is the heir, with all the prospective distinction that attaches to such a position. Surely that would have been a still greater misalliance?"

"Geoffrey's the heir," he said, in a low, clear voice.

"Geoffrey—that is, Mr. Geoffrey!" The widow thought the manufacturer had gone crazy.

"You must keep it to yourself at present, Mrs. Bland. I thought it just as well to *warn you*."

The lady addressed credited the manufacturer henceforth with a large balance of perception. His quickness in ascertaining her own views evoked her admiration, and for one brief moment her confusion also. She made no allusion to his last significant

expression. Further conversation was stayed by the retirement of the ladies. The gentlemen then drew up to the master of the house, and the company resolved itself into a kind of committee—a very pleasant committee, much more comfortable than many of a more official character. The wine was good, the members were disposed to be affable, and the subject was one on which the majority were generally agreed.

Mr. Emlott was especially at home. The subject of a Mechanics' Institute was one on which he could offer many practical suggestions. Had he so chosen, he could have talked from the standpoint of personal experience as well as of observation. He did not do so; nevertheless his remarks displayed a thorough knowledge of the wants, even the intellectual wants, of a town growing fast, and rapidly increasing in importance. Besides, he was sipping port now, and at this stage he felt his equality with the rest of the company; nay, he listened to men like Skillicorne with a bland condescension which must have been very gratifying to those gentlemen.

"You are taking no wine," said the master of the feast, hospitably, to one of his neighbours on his right.

"No more, thank you; but, if I may, I will ask you for a glass of beer."

"Certainly. Timmins, a glass of beer to Mr. Downton."

Ebenezer stared at the stranger with undisguised astonishment. He was a good-looking man, but dressed in a most free and easy manner—the only one at the table not in the customary black and white. We may explain to the reader that the gentleman's presence at dinner was accidental. He had driven over some twelve miles to see Mr. Grewby, and had been pressed to stay.

"How on earth did that fellow get in here?" he said to himself, with a glance of contempt at the object of his reflections. "Downton, did he say? Let me see. There's no Downton in Lackington. Perhaps he's some kind o' representative from one of them institutions i' Templeton or Gladwick—an agent or deputy."

"Who is that fellow across who asked for beer?" he whispered to the Lackington doctor.

"That in the light suit? That's Mr. Downton, of Boxthorpe Hall, nephew to Lord Chippendale—the best rider to cover in the county."

"Boxthorpe Hall—nephew to a lord! You're mistaken, surely. He asked for beer, you know—cost thrippence at th' outside. Why, this port's nearly as good as my own; eight shillings a bottle, at the least."

"It's good wine, undoubtedly," said the doctor, filling his glass.

From that moment till the company separated, the manufacturer's glance was not taken off the nephew to Lord Chippendale, and as he drove homewards he still followed that gentleman with his mental eye. He could not forget that request for a glass of beer. What did it mean? What was the object or end in view when he refused the port, and asked for such a low and commonplace drink as beer? It was several years since malt liquor had stood on his own table. He had given it up, with other low habits and degrading tastes. And now, on this his first and so auspicious visit to Grewby House, the place where, of all other places in the neighbourhood, he had expected to see the best manners of the best society, a guest, who was nothing less than a nephew to a lord, and who owned one of the largest properties in the county, had actually asked for a glass of beer, and the request had met with the politest and most instant attention. Come what might, he would speak to Tomkins about it. That fellow could tell him, if he were inclined to do so.

"Will you take anything before you retire, sir?" said the footman, when Ebenezer had got his slippers on.

"No, I think not—just the whisky and hot water,

as usual. Tomkins, they had beer at dinner!" He expected Tomkins would have dropped his boots in his astonishment. Nothing of the kind.

"Yes, sir. With the cheese, I suppose, sir. Some gentlemen do like it with Stilton."

"I don't know what you mean about cheese and Stilton; but Mr. Downton, as lives at Boxthorpe Hall, and is nephew to Lord Chippendale, refused a glass of port as must ha' bin eight shillings i' the bottle, and asked plump out for a glass o' beer as couldna ha' cost more than thrippence at th' outside. You pretends as you knows a great deal; leastways, you shows off wi' a good many airs and graces and sich like; how do you reconcile that?" And Ebenezer looked as if he had put a poser, indeed.

"Perhaps he preferred it, sir."

"Do you mean to tell me as that gentleman asked for that glass o' beer simply because he liked it?"

"I should presume so, sir."

"But, Tomkins, stay one moment." The footman was retiring — he stopped. "You forget the beer could not ha' bin more than thrippence, and the port was nearly as good as my own. Now, that's low, I should say. Isn't that low, Tomkins?"

"Gentlemen in a position like that you say this gentleman belonged to can afford to drink what they like best."

"You mean deliberately to suggest as he asked for it 'cause he wanted it?"

"Quite so, sir; exactly, sir."

The footman left him, and Ebenezer fell into a deep reverie. At intervals he sipped his nightcap —or night-cup, as I suppose it should be called—but the air of deep and concentrated thought never left his face. He seemed troubled and anxious. "Eh, but it's a strange world," he said, half aloud, "and it behoves us to walk warily in it. To think as he asked for that beer simply because he liked it! It's a regular stumper, that is."

He went upstairs to his room. He was still reflecting. But ere he got into bed he rang the bell.

A maid came to the door. "Tell Tomkins I want him."

Tomkins came.

"Tomkins, you can send down to Stubbs's, as is oppo-site the town offices, and tell him to send up a barrel of his best bitter at once. Tell him I must ha' it by twelve o'clock, or I'll go to Nevin's i' future."

"Yes, sir."

CHAPTER VII.

"A favourite boundary to their lengthened walks
This churchyard was. And, whether they had come
Treading their path in sympathy, and link'd
In social converse, or by some short space
Discreetly parted to preserve the peace,
One spirit seldom failed to extend its sway
Over both minds, when they awhile had mark'd
The visible quiet of this holy ground
And breathed its soothing air."

The Excursion.

SEVERAL weeks passed away. Johnnie improved with every returning day, although as yet, both by the doctor's orders and by the express wish of Mr. Lexley and Geoffrey, he did not take his customary place in the office. Had not the invalid had an occupation, he would have found the time hang upon his hands. But he and the late clerk were constantly together, generally at Isaac's cottage, sometimes in the churchyard, or even in the vestry itself; for, although retired from official life, the genealogist had still the free run of the registers. He was far too

useful to the present holder of that dignified position for him to turn crusty at Isaac's repeated and constantly recurring visits. Isaac knew the records by heart, and when a baptismal or marriage certificate was wanted, he it was to whom the new clerk turned with an assurance, seldom misplaced, that he could lay his finger on the very book, page, and line where such entry was contained.

Johnnie often accompanied him at these times, and he had now a collection of names almost equal to that of Isaac himself. This, however, was not the only scene of their labours, which could scarce merit the name; for pleasure seemed at its highest in the hearts of both, when together they could wander to some neighbouring village, and inspect with diligent eye the gravestones, epitaphs, mural tablets, and other objects that were of a nature to merit their curiosity. On occasions when they wished to go still further into the country, Johnnie would get the pony into the small basket carriage, and he and Isaac would make a day of it. How they enjoyed themselves! What a charm had every surrounding of such short raids upon these rural spots to them: the sleepy, lazy inn—not too sleepy or lazy, however, to insure them a comfortable welcome; the cool, sweet grasses on which they sat as they copied out the inscriptions of the God's-acre!

And truly a God's-acre was it to these two—even to Isaac in a sense. No mere necropolis this, no city of the actual dead; no, not even a cemetery, not even a sleeping-place. To them the green turf beneath was peopled with living inhabitants. It had come to pass that, as Johnnie and Isaac lingered over these simple memorials, they had fallen into a way of talking about them of whom the gravestones spoke as of men who were not dead. Isaac would recount their lives, or such particular events as had ruffled the tide of their otherwise peaceful course, and each in his way would moralize thereupon. Here Johnnie, who had thought more, was chief; and the genealogist would listen with a kind of reverence, while the other would debate down what another current might their lives have floated had not such and such a circumstance transpired. 'Tis not for us to say what lessons were learnt by the genealogist. He had passed his days in that hardest and most obstructive path to all quickening life, that which leads through the little businesses of religion. They are wont to think least of death who bury the dead; the doctrine of annihilation upon an undertaker or sexton must be invariably powerful. To see day by day the helplessness of death; to see the body unresistingly nailed down, let down, and covered down, must seem the body kept eternally down. Thus

"dust to dust" is a sentence beyond whose literal frontier their mental vision ceases to pass. Of Isaac I have said that he spoke of them that lay below as still living, but it was that life with which the gravedigger always invests the dead—the life of the past; he never looks forward. He will talk by the hour of what they said and did, what was their chief foible, which their strong point; he will deliver himself marvellously of relations that attached to them up to the moment when he himself came in and played his part; but there he stops, and he has nothing more to say. I am not sure that it is not this tendency to dwell on the past which is the prime cause of this curious infidelity.

But with Johnnie it was all different. His nature and constitution, to add no higher influence, had made him religious. Not moodily so, however, as is often the case when the body, as well as the mind, is not strong, for with him there was a certain simplicity and naturalness of faith which ran counter to despondency. It was this that made his religion a living, cheering thing. He was a man in whose soul Reason fought at such terrible odds with Faith that the last could not but win the battle. "Blessed is he who hath not seen, and yet hath believed." If ever man enjoyed the blessing, it was Johnnie Lexley. To him the future was wondrously more real than

the past; to him hidden things were more manifest than they which have been brought to light. In the churchyard Isaac talked of the dead; Johnnie, with them; and while the one saw but crumbling and incarcerated dust, the other beheld and communed with risen and free-winged spirits. I do not think it did Isaac any harm to have Johnnie for his companion in these afternoons glorified by the early autumn, when they sat beneath the yew trees of the God's-acres, and spoke their meditations.

"Eh, Mester Johnnie, I shall look back o' these days i' th' winter, when th' snow be come."

"We must count up our treasures, and content ourselves with the registers," said Johnnie, cheerily.

"Ay, ay. What a vast o' difference there is atwixt winter and summer. To think as we's enjoying oursels i' taking down these i'scriptions, and i' a few months' toime we shall ha' to lay by, like th' birds and toads and sich like, till spring's up again. Eh, but it's well as th' dead know nowt about it. They'd be perished wi' cold, I take it, if they'd any feelings i' them."

"It's nice to think, though, that their bodies have been redeemed, as well as their souls," said the younger, brightly. "That's why I like that word 'God's-acre.' I say, Ike, let's you and I always call the churchyard 'God's-acre,' just when we're alone, you know."

"I dunna mind, if it's a old word. 'Cemetery' seems the favourite word nowadays."

"I like that, too; it's a beautiful word."

"Well, it be a fairish-sized word, I mun confess; but it's nowt like th' Athanasian Creed. Them's words for you. I never missed a Whit-Sunday or Trinity Sunday, or t'other occasions as I knows on, since I wur a child, all for that creed. Old Doctor Cobbe, him as came afore Mr. Bradford, he wur the man to say that creed; he seemed a'most to spell them words 'incomprehensible' and sich like, as if he feart to miss out a letter o't."

"It's many years since I read it," said Johnnie. "But I was not thinking of 'cemetery' as a long word, but of its meaning."

"Its meaning! Well, of course it's a meaning like owt else. What's a word meant for but to ha' a meaning at th' end on't? It's used for to distinguish a burial-yard as is not attached to the church; and, for my part, I wish they'd be content wi' th' yards as they are. New-fangled things? Why, lad, they ha'na a single entry aboov thretty years old. Thretty years—think o' that—and there's graves here as is more nor three hundert." Isaac looked contemptuous.

"I believe it is becoming customary to use the word so; but you don't know Latin, I suppose, Ike?"

"Just a smattering, as I has picked up loike i' deciphering o' these family i'scriptions. I goes to a dictionary and furrits it out somehow. It's a queer kind o' langwidge, though. They've no word for bad i' that langwidge, ha' they?"

"Bad? Oh yes, 'malus,' or 'pravus,' or 'nequam.'"

"Why, they've three at that rate. But look here now, how's it they've no positive nor comparative? That's allus bin a puzzle to me."

"But they have. Whatever made you think that?"

"Bean't 'issimus' a sign o' th' superlative?"

"Yes; what of that?"

"Well, if I've seed one family i'scription i' Latin, I've seen five hundert, and I never clapped eyes on owt but 'issimus' throughout the whole lot. There's 'nobilissimus, ornatissimus, excelsissimus, excellentissimus;' them you know 's common. One of th' longest as ever I seed was that o' Sir Thomas Bragg, th' Indian hero—him as fought i' sixty-three pitched battles, and never got so much as a scratch. They say, somehow, as he wur allus out o' th' reach o' th' shot. Queer thing, weren't it? Well, they's got 'nobilitatissimus' at th' end o' his name, long as th' tail o' a kite. Another long un's that over Josiah Blessington, o' Kedgwick. He died worth a mint o' money—I darena say how

much, but all made i' th' place. Afore he departed he left five pound a year i' loaves to be distributed o' Christmas Eve. He gave special orders as there was to be bran put i' th' flour, to make it go further, and prevent 'em getting discontented wi' their position. Well, they've put a tablet up i' th' church chancel to that effect. There's a figure o' a short, stumpy kind o' man wi' his two hands out, each holding a loaf welly as big as himself over a little picture o' th' roofs o' Kedgwick village, and 'Blessingtown's' printed underneath. It's a bit o' a play on th' name, you see. Underneath that, again, there's 'vir benevolentissimus.' 'Vir,' I s'pose, is owd English for 'very;' so, if you add that to th' other, it makes two superlatives; but I think one would ha' been enough. Five pound 's no great shakes, after all. Besides, th' memorial cost one hundert and fifty pounds."

"Was it got up by subscription?"

"Yes; th' farmers and t' others knew as it 'ud be expected by th' family, so they did it among theirsels shortly arterwards."

"Why, that put out at interest would have paid for the loaves itself."

"So Billy Stumps, as is a bit wrong i' his head, and can't do mich arithmetic, said; but no one heeded him, you know. Well, it's the first time as ever I

knowed as 'bad' wur i' the Latin langwidge. Is 'cemetery' Latin?"

"No; that's Greek. It means a sleeping-place."

"That's queer, now, that is, when you remember as they's dead that's inside o't."

"But you remember the little girl, Ike? Jesus Christ said, 'She is not dead, but sleepeth.' The early Greek Church must have got the idea from St. Paul, I think, and he from Christ. With him, death is always a sleep. The grave is a cradle; our abiding there is an infant's slumber, while Jesus Himself draws the curtain, and watches over our repose. Daniel speaks of the dead in this manner. He says, 'And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake.'"

"I like that," said Isaac, decidedly. "And what o' God's-acre, as you was a-speaking on?"

"I asked if you knew Latin, because 'acre' is connected with the Latin 'ager;" that is, an open ploughed field. It was always so used in England till it became a statute measure in Edward the Third's reign. Thus, God's-acre means 'God's sown land.' The churchyard is His peculiar soil. Everybody laid there is a seed of God's planting. Thus, as each generation passes away, and is buried therein, there is wafted from around, and especially from the church beside, the hopeful whisper of a great harvest-tide

to come, when the seed thus sown in corruption shall be raised an incorruptible body."

"Ay, ay, I like that; go on."

"There's no more to say. 'The harvest,' as it is said, 'is the end of the world.' The good seed are the children of the kingdom; the reapers are the angels. When the word is given they will put to their sickles, and the wheat shall be gathered into the garner of Christ for ever."

"Ay, ay. One mun think a bit more about them things, Mester John. I am getting owd, I am, and sleepy-like. I should wish to sleep i' th' manner as you've mentioned, for it's but human nature to wish to wakken up again some day. If I'm spared till next spring, I'll go and watch Farmer Bates sow th' Eleven Acre as he's so proud on. I'll go if I miss th' afternoon prayers for't. Why, Mester John, if a man wur i' th' right mood, he might do himself as much good i' one visit to a ploughing as a whole month o' arternoon prayers."

"I shouldn't like to say that, Ike. That's going to the other end of the tether. But a man's always in church who studies nature reverently."

"I see, I see. It's allus preaching, you mean."

"Always."

"And a very nice kind o' preaching it is, I s'ud say fro' what I've yeard to-day. But it's time we

was a-gate agen, if we're to finish this afore it's time to go home." Isaac looked at Johnnie, and then said, "I say, lad, there's a good deal o' trouble in this life of ourn, isna there now?"

"A great deal for some people, Ike."

"You've been looking pale-like latterly; I don't mean wi' your sickness exactly."

"So you have noticed it? I thought I carried it entirely within." Johnnie said this as if in meditation.

"I'm not a man o' mich discrimination, but I know when trouble as sits on th' face is fro' the mind reyther than th' body. You mun keep up your spirits, Mester Johnnie. I s'ud feel sore at heart if you was to pass through th' furnace and be scathed. It'll all be over some day, and then you'll be at rest, and only wait for th' wakkening. You mun fall back on what you've said to me."

"I hope I shall, Ike. Though you will never know the cause, I feel somehow glad you know that I have trouble to bear. It seems to lighten the load a bit."

"I know more nor you think for, Mester Johnnie, and, if you'll believe me, I could wish it was myself and not you."

"You don't know my trouble, Ike," said Johnnie, with a smile.

"Yea, lad, I do."

Johnnie smiled incredulously: he had opened his heart to nobody.

And thus these two returned home: the one offering an honest sympathy for a sorrow he wotted nought about; the other receiving it, and finding it a medicine for that for which it was not intended to be a balm. Before now a doctor has administered a potion for one disease which has healed another; and sympathy is a physic that is wonderfully general in its curative properties.

I think I am right in saying that Johnnie could not do much harm to Isaac as they rambled abroad in search of their peculiar knowledge. It is possible that in his heart, too, was a medicinal spring which, as it flowed forth in words of simple unction, was treating a disease wholesomely which had had long and secret hold of the other's constitution.

The two parted as they drew near to Lackington. To-day they had walked four miles away, to a village church that lay on the hillside. Johnnie went home; Isaac turned aside and stopped at the lodge gate of Grewby Park. He was somewhat surprised to find a tall thin man appear in answer to the bell.

"Is Mrs. Banyer in?"

"No. You're Mr. Curling, bean't you? I've seen you at th' church. She's gone to be housekeeper at th' house, and I'm comed here i' her place."

"And she's never sent me word," said Isaac.

"She's a fine woman, Mr. Curling," rejoined the tall thin man, looking with a slightly sour aspect on the genealogist; "a very fine woman, and such as her doan't trouble much to tell them as is only ordinary acquaintance the secrets o' domestic life. I've known Catharine many a long year. You're a unmarried man, aren't you?" Isaac's interrogator glared suspiciously upon the comer.

"Yes, I hope so," laughed the visitor.

"And hope to remain so, no doubt?"

"Perhaps so. She's a fine woman as you say, Mr. Cooper." Isaac rather enjoyed it. Evidently the steward—for in that capacity Mr. Cooper acted, and had acted for a dozen years at least—was something more than merely charmed with the widow.

"To them as can appreciate her beauties. I refer to the heart, Mr. Curling. Skin beauty is but skin-deep. But, howsomdever, if you've anything to say to her, I'll carry it for you. It's a long way to th' house, and I've to go there i' th' evening."

Isaac pondered a moment. "Just as well," he said to himself; "I've nothing to tell her. In fact, I was only coming to tell her I was further from the scent than ever." Then he spoke aloud: "You can say as I've bin doing my best i' that business as she knows on, and I can't get no nearer to it as yet.

The trail lies another way, tell her. Can you remember all that?"

"Ay. I'll tell her all as you've said, no fear. So you and she has secrets atween you, eh?"

"A good many," rejoined Isaac, laughing. "Catharine and me's very thick."

The thin man growled, and was uncivil enough to make no response to the antiquarian's "Good evening to you."

"There's no fear o' her blabbing," said Isaac, as he pursued his way homewards; "and I'm not so sure as she wouldna ha' come down heavy on me for ha'ing failed thus far. It's the Lexleys as she has claims on, depend on't. Mr. John was born i' London, too; and he's not the heir, to start with. Eh, but I'm sorry. He spoke nice about them churchyards, God's-acres as he called 'em. I'll stick to that title for th' future."

CHAPTER VIII.

"Griev'd I, I had but one?
Chid I for that at frugal nature's frame?
O, one too much by thee! Why had I one?
Why ever wast thou lovely in mine eyes?"

Much Ado About Nothing.

EVER since the picnic to Garsington Abbey there had been a visible change in Cécile's demeanour. I do not mean to say that to every one of those who had known her previously she had become an altered being. There had been no abrupt transition of mood; there had begun no new epoch of constitutional disposition. There had been none of those sudden shifts from one physical or mental condition to another which the wider world of our acquaintance are quick to detect, and as speedy to speculate upon. I do not think that more than two or three had noticed it. Still, to those two or three in whom affection's eye had a quicker discernment, this change was a matter of anxiety.

When Cécile reached home that day she had gone straight to her room. And thither, after a few

minutes, followed Mrs. Haddock, full of maternal and also curious solicitude. Women are keen in certain matters, and the good motherly soul of the parson's wife was full to overflowing with desire to learn the issue of this day's doings. She knew well a crisis had come and passed in Cécile's life. She herself had, to the best of her woman's craft and wisdom, helped to bring it on. One thing she was already assured about without her niece's declaration, that the result she had acquiesced in was not likely to be accomplished. She was sorry. To see Cécile comfortably settled in life was perhaps the highest ambition of her heart just now, always saving and excepting the new church that was daily approaching to its completion. Here she was true to her husband, her children, and her wifely interests. Morning and night that lay upon her mind; morning and night her prayers were mingled with just so much amount of earthly-mindedness as would have made her severe upon her own heart, had she known that it was there. But it was not for herself she prayed; and it was that unselfish yearning for the happiness of those whose happiness she would have surrendered life for, that made her ignorant of the peculiar elements of which her present supplications consisted.

Still she had time to think about, and think for, Cécile. She had soon perceived Geoffrey's admira-

tion. Of all the Lexley family he alone had boldly, and yet with all due decorum, pushed himself into the narrowest circle of intimacy. Women not merely have great intuition, but they like to exercise it. Mrs. Haddock thought she knew the precise moment when young Lexley ceased to be the friend and became the lover. She could point, so she imagined, to the exact spot where the pathway of friendly intimacy had turned into the green and flowery track of courtly attention. When friendship became submerged in love, she had made no attempt to rescue friendship from its awkward and perilous position, and across the footpath of courtship that led out of the broader road of friendliness she had planted no bar nor fence. She liked Geoffrey Lexley. He was honest, and brave, and rich. He had been brought up in a narrow school, but better this than the freedom from all restraint that marked the career of so many youthful scions of the better-placed families around. She and hers were narrow also—so, doubtless, the world in general thought. She would miss Cécile sadly—that of course; but being of course, she had spent no more thought on it than she could help. She did not know what they would do without Cécile's help and Cécile's little stipend; but that lay in the future, and for the present it was Cécile's well-being that was concerned.

That all these thoughts and schemes had passed through her heart and brain, her niece was wholly unconscious. It was not until the previous night that she had found out Geoffrey's intentions, and it was not till to-day she had heard them from his own lips. There was a dim conviction in her mind—she scarce knew how it had got there—that her aunt, if not her uncle, had allowed, if not actually aided, Geoffrey Lexley in becoming her fast and only companion throughout the day, and this especially in the matter of their return home. For this reason she blushed a deep crimson when Mrs. Haddock entered her room.

"Well, love, what is it to be?" she whispered, taking her niece into her arms. "Am I to lose you?"

"I shall never leave you, auntie."

"Never? Never is a long word, child." Her aunt caressed her head as it lay on her shoulder, for she felt rather than heard the heavy sob which Cécile in vain tried to keep down.

"Will you promise me something, dear auntie?" said Cécile, suddenly and earnestly.

"I must hear the request first," replied Mrs. Haddock, still nursing Cécile's face against her own neck.

"You will never scheme to take me away from you again?"

The whole mother, guardian, woman, rushed into Mrs. Haddock's heart at the word "scheme." "God forbid I should give you up but for your good, child! You do not suppose I want to get rid of you. We shall indeed be desolate when you are gone."

"But I shall never go, aunt. Let me stay with you; give no aid, no silent assent, to any means for taking me from you, and I will work from morning till night for you and uncle. I know a plan by which I can earn more money than I am now getting. I will give lessons in the evening, after I get back from the Blands'. Mrs. Carruthers wants her little girl to learn music; but she has to attend to the shop during the day, and so if she has lessons they must be given at night. I could get others beside her, I am sure. It would be something. I am determined I will not be so burdensome to you and uncle as I have been."

"My darling, you are so far from burdensome that your income, little as it may seem, is of all consequence to your uncle and myself; your little salary last Christmas staved off what might have been absolute starvation."

"Then you will let me stay?"

"Yes, love, till you voluntarily leave us—which I trust will not be till he who is worthy of you, whoever that shall be, comes to take you."

"Aunt, I shall never marry—never!" said Cécile, hotly, but very decisively.

Mrs. Haddock was surprised at the marked determination in the tone of her niece's voice. She thought it better to leave this topic altogether.

It was, as I have said, from this date that, to a certain few, an alteration, rather felt than observed, took place in Cécile. She did not look hectic nor ill; she did not vary her occupation; she did not lose her appetite; she did not cease to play with the children; she did not become unwontedly abstracted; she did not start when addressed, as if suddenly recalled from some far-off mental wanderings;—she did not, in a word, display any of those symptomatic tendencies which are supposed to affect a young lady whose love affairs have not run with entire smoothness. What was it made the change? To Mrs. Haddock, and to one or two more, it was simply this—everything she did was underlaid with determination. To the children her laugh was as merry, her care as sedulous, her stories as rich with vivid colouring as ever; to them nothing was changed. To Mrs. Haddock, who looked on, it was different. An undercurrent of deliberate resolution marred the whole. Nothing was spontaneous; all was the result of determined effort. Nor did time work round her mood to its old habit. The weeks

of the holiday went by, and when the morning came for her return to Westbourne Villa, she went forth with a certain eagerness to the discharge of her duties. Her pupils, like her little cousins, saw no alteration ; or if they were struck at all, it was by the unpleasing reflection that Miss Marnott was more than ever intent upon instilling into their youthful minds those particular studies which it was her business to impart, and for which she was "so very liberally paid"—so they had heard Maria say.

These were not happy days for Cécile. So long as Johnnie Lexley was presumed to be heir to the family estate, and the position accompanying it, it had seemed to Mrs. Bland and Maria that every young lady in Lackington was setting her cap at him, out of actual hostility to the plans laid down in Westbourne Villa. Chief among those had they fixed upon Cécile Marnott. They could not recall a single visit of Johnnie's to the villa without associating therewith some forward attempt on the part of the governess to oust Maria from her position as the object of his most devoted attentions. But no sooner was Johnnie discovered to be living on false pretensions, than it was discovered also that she had done nothing of the kind. She had been secretly plotting for the attentions of his brother. A thousand proofs of her craft were dragged to light. Did I

say "dragged"? Her manœuvres displayed themselves to their unscaled eyes with a most objectionable nakedness. To Mrs. Bland and her daughter it was plainly evident that Cécile had known this secret all the time, and had taken advantage thereof, not merely to blind them to the actual truth, but to further her own designs.

Their indignation was something extraordinary. Their views of human morality were lowered to a point which nearly approximated to zero. That any graduation towards a kindly inspection of the motives that prompt to human action should ever commence was hopeless for the present. Just now mankind was represented by Miss Marnott. Her heart was utterly surrounded with a cold and icy disregard for all that appertained to the loftier instincts and attributes of man. Her deceit had been something so demoniacal that she had ceased to belong to the race of mankind at all. She was possessed of the cunning so proverbially attached to the serpent, and which, as Mrs. Bland herself observed with clasped hands, had brought evil at the very first into the world.

Miss Marnott, I say, had a very bad time of it after the commencement of the second half of her yearly attendance at Westbourne Villa. Formerly she had received a studious disdain at the hands of her employer, or rather employers—for Maria had from

the first taken upon her a coadjutorship of office in respect of the education of the younger members of the family. Now their contempt was open, and their wrath found vent in every device that could render her position uncomfortable, and her mind harassed.

Mrs. Bland was anxious for various reasons to keep on good terms with the Haddocks. But she had learnt by this time that there was little fear of Cécile relating the painfulnesses of her position. The salary she gave, small as it was, was of all consequence to the family that resided in the parsonage. In the fulness of her heart Cécile had early shown how earnest she was to do her little to render that household at ease in regard to monetary matters. There was little probability that, if the governess threw up her duties, she could get a situation in the immediate neighbourhood, and a daily place was the great aim of Cécile and her friends. At home there were children to attend, to instruct, to wash, to soothe to sleep, to do a hundred small things for ; all of which was so much help to Mrs. Haddock, who kept but one servant, and was sometimes obliged to do without that one. When she had learnt this, Mrs. Bland made the fullest use of her discovery. Formal contempt turned into open insolence.

About this time her pupils were also very trouble-

some to the governess. If there be one thing which children discover quicker than another it is any change of those relations which exist between the dependants of a family and the head. They at once found out that they could take greater liberties with Miss Marnott this second half year than the first.

"I hate geography, Miss Marnott," said Reggie one day, shutting up his book.

"I am sorry for that," replied Cécile, quietly. "It is always discouraging to begin a task for which we have no liking. But 'hate' is a strong word."

"I hate it, and I won't learn it," rejoined Reggie, with bold assertion. "Mamma says you are the worst teacher she ever saw," he added, with a leer of malicious scorn.

"Mrs. Bland did not intend you to hear that, I am sure; and, if she did, it was most ungentlemanly for a little boy to repeat it to her of whom it was said. In the mean time the geography of the west coast of Scotland is your lesson, and I must see that you learn it."

"I won't, then; there's for you!"

"Then I must keep you in at twelve o'clock. It will be most inconvenient for me to stay to-day. I have many little things to do at home between the school hours. Will you compel me to stop?"

"Yes." The lad looked very insolent. "I know

it's only to wash the pots. I've heard mamma say that's what you do at home."

When twelve o'clock came Clara left the room, and went to play in the garden. Reggie saw her through the window. Suddenly he made a quick dart across the room, and sprang out of the open sash. He laughed at his triumph, and shouted, "Don't let me keep you, pray! You can go back to your scullery work now!"

Cécile went into the dining-room. Mrs. Bland was reading a novel, reclining upon a sofa-couch. Cécile's face was all aflush. "Might I see you for a moment, Mrs. Bland?"

"Well, just for a moment. But you look hurried, Miss Marnott, and haste is always unbecoming in a young lady."

"I wish to ask if you will kindly refrain from making remarks, disparaging or otherwise, about myself before my pupils. I find it is utterly obstructive to progress in the schoolroom."

"Really, Miss Marnott, I cannot be troubled with schoolroom complaints. That domain is yours, and I cannot undertake to do work for which you are yourself paid."

"I am sorry to appear obtrusive, but I find that unless I can preserve due respect for myself and my position, it is impossible to teach with any suc-

cess. Master Reggie is not respectful, and he lacks courtesy."

"To whom?" said Mrs. Bland, smilingly sarcastic.

"To myself, his governess."

"Master Reggie will always pay regard to them to whom it is due. He comes of gentle stock, Miss Marnott."

"Miss Marnott cannot be expected to understand Reggie, you know, mamma. Out of the question," put in Maria, who was in an armchair by the open window.

"Of course not, love. I do not ask Miss Marnott to study instincts which come only of blood, and are beyond her comprehension. I did not engage her to teach him the refinements of the position which will be his some day—those he will acquire out of school hours; but I did engage her to instruct him in certain subjects which, with the laudable object of earning a livelihood thereby, she stated to me she had made herself familiar with. This I expect her to be able to do, without continually appealing to me for assistance." This was Cécile's first appeal, but perhaps Mrs. Bland was looking into the future. "Miss Conroy does not trouble me to help her in making up my dresses. I may add, also, that I do not like that habit so prevalent among governesses of making their pupils' want of respect an excuse for their own lack of ability."

"Just like Miss Barley, and Miss Willing, and Miss Brampton," put in Marie.

"Yes, I fear they are all alike," rejoined the mother, trying to look submissive to some heavy disposition of Providence. Miss Marnott was the fourth governess in fourteen months.

"Am I to understand then, Mrs. Bland, that Master Reggie is to be permitted to hear your criticisms of my position as a teacher in this house, and then to repeat them to me?"

"What is said and done in the drawing-room is my affair, Miss Marnott; what is said and done in the schoolroom is yours."

"Thank you," said Cécile, quickly. "Then I shall most assuredly administer corporal punishment."

"Corporal punishment!" Mrs. Bland started up in her passion.

"Certainly," said Cécile, warmly. "If my employer will not protect me from rudeness, not to say insult, I must take measures of my own in self-defence."

"You dare to talk of administering corporal punishment to Reggie, with his delicate frame already——"

"He's too stout," put in Cécile.

"Already weakened by a feeble appetite!" said Mrs. Bland.

"He eats to repletion," added the governess.

"You are insolent, Miss Marnott! I expect due respect to be paid to one who will shortly be in possession of large landed estates in different parts of the country."

"I do not know anything about the landed estates, but he certainly is already possessed of indifferent parts," said Cécile, scarcely aware she was punning.

"You may go, Miss Marnott," said Mrs. Bland, with grand offence. "But if I hear of you daring to chastise Reggie, I shall be prepared to act accordingly."

Poor Cécile! She had lost her temper at the last, but it was excusable. Let her spirit be what it might, she could not but come off second best. Only one path lay before her, and to follow it was out of the question—to resign her situation. At least, she must see her way to the obtaining of another place first. She went back to the schoolroom disheartened and thoroughly crushed. Between Reggie's natural disposition on the one side, and Maria and Mrs. Bland on the other, success in the discharge of her duties was utterly impossible. Reggie triumphed to-day, and one single such triumph as this, she well knew, was sufficient in itself to cripple her power and influence over him for the rest of the year.

These were dark days for Cécile.

CHAPTER IX.

Knight. My lord, I know not what the matter is; but, to my judgment, your highness is not entertained with that ceremonious affection as you were wont; there's a great abatement of kindness appears, as well in the general dependants, as in the duke himself also, and your daughter.

Lear. Ha! say'st thou so? . . . . I have perceived a most faint neglect of late.—*King Lear.*

ABOUT this time there were several people anxious to meet with several other people. Mr. Ebenezer Emlott was desirous of striking the iron while it was hot. He had a carriage, a new horse, a crest, a footman, and a fact (his invitation to Grewby House) to meditate upon and to glorify himself with; but he lacked one thing—a mistress to preside over his establishment. He was anxious to meet Mrs. Bland, and prosecute his suit. His last conversation with her had been eminently calculated to awaken his hopes. She had not merely received his attention with favour, but, if he might dare to say so of a lady possessed of Mrs. Bland's propriety, she had con-

descended to meet him halfway. He must give a dinner himself, and he must have Mrs. Bland there.

In accordance with his uncle's desires, and, let it be added, in harmony with his own views, Ben was determined on establishing himself in the favour of Miss Maria Bland. His hours at the mill were long and wearisome. Under the strict eye of his uncle he had less chance of obtaining an occasional holiday than his brothers; and, indeed, unless some relaxation was allowed him, it seemed hopeless that he should ever get the opportunity of seeing Mrs. Bland's daughter, much less of making himself acceptable in her eyes as a suitor for her hand and fortune. Here, too, the dinner-party came in as a means to an end. Thereby the two might be brought together.

Nor were these the only two who were casting about for opportunities of falling in with those with whom they wished to be on terms of something more than mere intimacy. Mrs. Bland and her daughter, for their part, were just as anxious to come down upon Geoffrey Lexley. Their hearts were filled with dismay when they remembered how, in a certain measure, they had slighted him on all former occasions. Then, Johnnie had so engrossed their minds that the other had been passed over with well-bred civilities and commonplace courtesies. Then, Johnnie

had appeared so estimable a prize that they had looked with actual apprehension on any circumstance that might bring him into converse with other Lackington ladies of a marriageable age. As he could not well call at the villa without encountering Cécile, that young lady had on that account, if no other, come in for the chief share of their hostility. But all perturbation was soothed to rest when the strange secret was unfolded into Mrs. Bland's ear at the Grewby dinner. Henceforth Cécile might share all Johnnie Lexley's attention without objection from them.

Not that they were at their ease; far from it. Now that Geoffrey was so suddenly set upon the pedestal which had been previously occupied by his brother, it was wonderful what memories cropped up of incidents wherein Geoffrey and Cécile had played a combined part. It was he who had invited her to go on the lake. It was she who had accepted that invitation. It was to the parsonage Geoffrey had so frequently gone of late, as Maria had discovered by means unnecessary to relate in detail. In that picnic to Garsington Abbey, several weeks ago, Geoffrey had been the only member of the party who could not claim to belong to the family. Geoffrey had called several times at the villa, and he had always been so particular in his inquiries after the governess

that twice Mrs. Bland had been absolutely compelled to send for her into the drawing-room. She had thought little of it then. She inwardly vowed that never again would she commit such a breach of prudence.

"I can't help thinking sometimes, mamma, that Mr. Geoffrey Lexley and Cécile Marnott have a secret understanding between them."

"Silly child! What do you mean?"

"They look very anxious when they meet, and never attempt to get together alone as they used to do. The latter fact is more suspicious than the former, to my mind."

"You don't think they are engaged?" said Mrs. Bland, in great alarm.

"Sometimes I fancy so. One thing I am sure of—that odious girl has been carrying out a fixed plan of her own for some weeks; and, if some one does not interfere, she will ensnare Mr. Geoffrey into a promise, or something of that kind, which she knows he will be too honourable not to fulfil."

"It is quite possible," responded Maria's mother, who in her heart had as high an opinion of her daughter's shrewdness as she had a low opinion of Cécile's honesty.

This and other brief conversations determined Mrs. Bland on a course of speedy, and at the same

time cautious, action. That Maria should be united to Geoffrey Lexley was now the wish of her heart. Several reasons for desiring this connection weighed upon her. One important incentive even her eldest daughter did not know in the reality of its importance. If it were true that Cécile and Geoffrey were engaged, all she was called upon to do was to get them disengaged as soon as possible. That it was possible she did not suffer herself to doubt. Sundry passages in her own youthful life lent their due influence in making her equanimous on that score. She remembered that such a task as this would not be the first of its kind; and if its result were as former results had been, she would be perfectly content.

That same day she and Maria called upon the Lexleys. They knew well how to time their visit, and almost the first to enter the drawing-room at the Grange was Geoffrey.

"I thought you would be at the mill, Mr. Geoffrey!" said Mrs. Bland, with well-prepared surprise.

"This is my dinner hour," replied he.

Here Johnnie came in.

"How do you do, Mrs. Bland?" he asked, coming forward with a pleasant frankness. "How are you, Miss Maria?"

Both were somewhat stiff in their response.

"Thank you, fairly well, I believe," said the mother; and instantly she turned again to the second brother. "When are you coming to see us again, Mr. Geoffrey?—Mr. Gip, I had almost called you. It seems quite an age since you honoured us with a call. Maria suggests—you know how mischievous she is, dear child!—that it is because the holidays have withdrawn the chief attraction from the villa for a few weeks."

Geoffrey flushed to the roots of his hair, and both mother and daughter saw it.

"You must not forget to tell Mr. Geoffrey that the attraction has come back again, mamma," said Maria, trying to impart a reproachful cast to the languishing look she threw upon the young manufacturer.

"No, indeed; but, of course, he knows. The idea of supposing that we can give him information on the subject of Miss Marnott's movements!" said the mother, with an ingenuous smile. She was trying to read the inmost soul of Geoffrey all the time.

"I am afraid I must ask you both to explain yourselves," replied Geoffrey, somewhat constrainedly, trying at the same time to laugh smoothly; but he failed.

Johnnie, after his first snub, sat quietly by the window. His face was pale, and his hands were

tightly clasped. He seemed to be studying the landscape without.

"Perhaps, then, my intended congratulations will be premature," said Mrs. Bland, slily.

"Congratulations? What have you heard?"

"Only that Mr. Geoffrey Lexley and Miss Marnott are engaged to be married as soon as a fit residence can be found for them. I am sure I trust that you will both be very happy."

"Your congratulations are, as yourself suggested, wholly premature. I am not engaged to Cécile—to Miss Marnott at all."

With a few more words of a general character, and with a promise extracted that Geoffrey would come and spend a quiet evening with them that same week, the two visitors left. "Johnnie, I dare say, will come with me," Geoffrey had added, and there had been no opportunity of frustrating that arrangement. It struck Mrs. Bland, too, that if Cécile were to be there—and it would be better to have her there—then Johnnie could be tacked on to her, and thus the pair in whom she was immediately interested would be left undisturbed.

By a clever but unscrupulous manœuvre Mrs. Bland had obtained the knowledge that Geoffrey and Cécile were not engaged. So far this was satisfactory. But from the manner of the young gentle-

man himself it was quite manifest that something had transpired, or was about to transpire, which might upset her own schemes if she were not very, very cautious. This it was that determined her to have Cécile at the villa when the young Lexleys came. She could quietly observe them, and had no doubt that ere the evening was over she should get at the exact relations in which these two stood to one another. That there were relations she had felt convinced.

This was to be a day far from unfruitful in incidents. Johnnie met Cécile on his way from the mill. Their place of meeting was that which Geoffrey so well knew—the corner of the lane that joined the main road into Lackington.

Both Johnnie and Cécile could see one another from some fifty yards' distance. This was to be no ordinary meeting. Johnnie had saved Cécile's life, and yet they had never met since that terrible day. Together with her aunt and uncle, Cécile Marnott had paid a special visit of gratitude to the invalid; but he had gone out with the genealogist, and, though they waited some time, he did not return. Of course this was not the only chance of their coming together. Johnnie might have brought it about easily. He might have called at the parsonage; he might have waylaid her every afternoon on his way home from

the mill ; he might have gone, as occasionally of late he had done, to Mr. Haddock's church. A gentleman has all these advantages over the lady. But Johnnie had not availed himself of his privileges. He had never called at the Haddocks', nor waylaid the governess on the road, nor entered the church. Considering what had transpired on that afternoon of the storm, it was somewhat remarkable that Johnnie should begin now what could scarce seem other than a systematic course of abstention from the Haddocks'.

They shook hands, each saying some incoherent word which the other was too agitated to catch.

Cécile first recovered herself.

"I feel so ungrateful only to be thanking you now for your noble and disinterested service to me." She spoke calmly, and as if she were repeating something learnt previously by heart.

"You must not mention it. I did only what any other man would have done. Geoffrey would have done it, and done it better than I. I am awkward, you know," he said, smiling sadly — "everybody says so."

"Awkward ! Think how cleverly you leapt down the rocks. I never recall it without a shudder. A single slip and you would have been killed."

"It seemed very easy then," said Johnnie, quietly.

"Then you deliberately sacrificed yourself for me, a mere acquaintance; it was very noble." Cécile's words began to tremble.

"A mere acquaintance!" Johnnie seemed in a maze, and murmured the words after her.

"Yes; and yet this is my first opportunity of thanking you for saving my life. I am not ungrateful, Mr. Lexley." She looked up at him for the first time. What a change had passed over his face since she had seen him last! It was pale and thinner. There were dark circular lines under the eyes, and the lips, too, seemed drawn. Strange to say, she who thus timidly surveyed him thought that the expression on his features was even softer and more sweet than she had ever seen it before.

"It is pleasant to receive your thanks; I know they are sincere. I shall see you to-morrow night, I suppose?" he added, quickly.

"Mrs. Bland has particularly desired me to stay all night," said Cécile, blushing.

"I want to speak to you about Geoffrey." Johnnie looked this time into Cécile's face.

"About Geoff—Mr. Geoffrey?" Suddenly she became constrained and stiff.

"Yes; I want to know if you mean to abide by your decision. He is such a brave and noble lad."

Then, from some cause or another, Cécile grew crimson with internal passion.

"And you wish once more to become Mr. Geoffrey's advocate?"

"This is the first time I have hinted—dared to hint at the subject," rejoined Johnnie, much amazed at his companion's tone and changed aspect.

"He brought credentials directly from you when he spoke to me at the picnic. He said you had sent him forth in the morning, wishing him all success in his purpose, and adding that you had seen the way things were turning, and that you thought I should not reject his suit."

"I am not sure that I put it exactly in that way, Miss Marnott; nevertheless, I plead guilty to believing that you—that you were going to reward Gipsy's constancy with a like return."

"Constancy, indeed!" Cécile did not know what she was saying. Her lips were quivering with passion.

"I fear I am saying the wrong thing, Miss Marnott, but I am not clever like Gipsy. He can always say the right thing. I hope I have not offended you?" added Johnnie, earnestly.

"Not at all. Good afternoon, Mr. Lexley; I am quite ashamed to have been keeping you so long."

"You are not keeping me," said her companion

simply; and he went home, wondering in his very innermost soul what it was he had said or done to offend Miss Marnott. He weighed every word which had been said on either side, but when he had entered the Grange porch, got his tea, looked over his treasures—not with any deep interest—and gone to bed, he was still no wiser. He could not understand it at all.

To the surprise of both Geoffrey and Johnnie they found, on reaching the Blands' the following night, their uncle Ebenezer and Ben comfortably ensconced in the drawing-room. Mrs. Bland had said so positively that no one else was to be invited, they could only suppose that she had changed her mind in the mean time. They had met their uncle's carriage returning empty from this direction, but it had not struck them that it might have set down its occupants at the villa.

Geoffrey was warmly greeted by the elder lady; Johnnie was as carefully ignored. A touch of two of the fingers was all the welcome vouchsafed to him. Mr. Emlott was not particularly fond of Geoffrey, but he, too, received a greeting from his uncle markedly different from that accorded to his brother.

Tea was almost immediately declared to be ready, and the portly manufacturer led the way into the dining-room with Mrs. Bland. Ben and Geoffrey

being at the time engaged in conversation with Maria, it seemed a question which would have the preference, but in response to the two extended arms she chose that of Geoffrey, and Ben, therefore, was obliged to follow alone in the rear. Johnnie took in Cécile.

By way of an excuse for bringing out Mr. Emlott's favourite wine, Mrs. Bland had got a couple of boiled fowls at the bottom of the table.

"A most enjoyable evening at Grewby," said she, as she poured out the tea. Verbs are often omitted when people are thus occupied.

"Most enjoyable. So pleasant to meet with gentlemen like Mr. Grewby; one of the old school, quite."

"He must be very lonely, I should think, living entirely by himself," said the tea-maker.

"Yes; but, if rumour can be trusted, he is to have a companion shortly, in the shape of a ward—a little girl from India. In the event of that proving true he would have to get a governess for her. He has led such a retired life for many years that it is said that at first he was determined to shirk the office, but the little brat—child is already on its way to England. It will be a good thing for him when he has once got used to the change. He wants rousing a bit. I think of having him down to dinner some day shortly. I

hope I shall be able to secure your presence at my table, ma'am?"

Even Ben, who was getting accustomed to the grandeur that was daily increasing at the Grove, stared at the notion of his uncle's "having Mr. Grewby down to dinner."

"It seems such a pity that a family like that of the Grewbys should come to an end," said Maria. "Is there no heir?"

"None nearer than a second cousin," replied Ebenezer. "People have often wondered he did not marry, but he never got over that sad affair about his brother."

"I can't get at the facts of that story," said Mrs. Bland.

"Neither can any one else, for the matter o' that," rejoined the deacon. "It's a mystery to every one but Mr. Grewby himself, and, maybe, his old footman; and, I may say, one or two more." This he said with a certain knowingness. "They do say as that fellow knows more even than his master. They're uncommon thick, there's no doubt about that."

"The elder brother shot himself in London, did he not?"

"Yes, immediately after coming out of a church."

"By-the-by, I must beg your pardon for my inquisitiveness. I had forgotten that your father

is reported to have been the unconscious cause of such a sad *dénouement*." This was addressed to Geoffrey.

"I believe my father is in some way associated with the story," replied Geoffrey, quietly; "but as he has never seen fit to take Johnnie or myself into his confidence on the subject, we have never spoken about it."

"Quite right. It is beautiful to see such instances of filial respect. It quite redeems mankind in my eyes, I assure you."

The evening was spent very much after the manner of all such evenings. Of course, there were exceptional circumstances which to some extent set it above the run of such occasions. Mr. Emlott and Mrs. Bland soon showed that they intended to devote themselves to one another, and that the young ones had their tacit consent to dispose of themselves as they listed. Ben availed himself of this to make up for his lost ground. He stuck fast to Maria for at least three hours, not altogether to the pleasure of that said lady, nor altogether to her dislike. She could play him off against Geoffrey—that was the view she took of it—and she did so. But her success was equivocal; and long before the evening was over, the iron of jealousy and rage had entered into her soul.

Cécile was determined not to be left in a *tête-à-tête* position either with Johnnie or Geoffrey, and therefore kept close beside Maria. This the latter took for a mere manœuvre by which to prevent her own plans. It was appreciated accordingly. Cécile refused to play, too, or sing, when asked to do so, and this only confirmed Maria in the view she had taken. Thus among the younger ones the conversation was perforce general, to the disappointment of at least two of those who were present.

"Will you not be persuaded to play?" said Johnnie, for the second time.

"No," said Cécile, somewhat curtly.

Then Geoffrey pressed her. It was evident that a silent understanding had passed between these two that they should go on on the old footing to such extent as was possible. To do so actually was as impossible as it ever is impossible under similar circumstances.

Still she refused; and then Maria, who had been asked by Ben, got up and ran through a set of polkas in a missish manner for one of her years. But she was in a state of towering wrath at the neglect she was enduring at the hands of Geoffrey and Johnnie. Even the latter, to whom she had displayed every kind of incivility since he had entered the house, by the fact of his attentions to Cécile,

had recovered for himself that position in her eyes which otherwise would have been so signally denied.

"Miss Marnott," she said, addressing the governess, "I think mamma will expect you to play."

"Oh, if Miss Cécile would really prefer not, I would not press her for anything," said Johnnie.

Geoffrey said the same thing.

"It is not exactly a matter of preference, Mr. Lexley," she rejoined, answering the latter. "Mamma requested Miss Marnott's company this evening merely—just for the sake of—in fact, to perform this very duty." Even Maria could not get through this piece of insolence without some hesitation.

There was a stillness of a few seconds.

Then Cécile got up and went across to Mrs. Bland. "Miss Bland says you expect me to play the piano to-night, in performance of my duties as a menial in your house. Is this so?"

"Miss Bland is, as usual, quite correct." Mrs. Bland had found, unexpectedly, that Mr. Emlott agreed with her that Cécile Marnott was a very forward and crafty girl. They were upon the subject when the governess came to her. Hence the answer so abrupt and contemptuous.

Cécile went to the piano, looked carefully over a selection of music, passing over several that had been former favourites with the Lexleys, and then,

settling herself down on the stool, began. She never ceased; without a pause she began a second piece when the first was ended. Johnnie and Geoffrey kept by the instrument, and turned over the pages; but to neither did she vouchsafe a word, nor did she respond, saving in monosyllables, to their occasional remarks. Both the lads were burning with indignation at the insult for which they had unintentionally paved the way; but it was impossible to show their sympathy otherwise than by paying a marked attention to the performance.

Maria was left with Ben, and the two kept up a conversation,—not a whispered one. Both talked in that loud and yet indistinguishable tone which is so harassing to a player.

Nevertheless, Miss Bland felt that she had been the loser on the whole. She had finally, for that night at least, lost the attentions of Geoffrey Lexley. He and his brother never for one instant deserted the side of Cécile till the time for their departure came. The louder she and her partner talked, the more hushed and attentive did these two become. The fire within raged furiously, and every moment but fanned the flame. She would pay Miss Marnott off for this.

It was the same at supper. Cécile sat—she had not wished it—but she sat between the two brothers.

And now her mood changed. She had been degraded and insulted before the Lexleys. Why should she not have her triumph in recompense? She began to talk; she laughed; she exerted herself to be agreeable to her companions; she met Maria's look with a glance of withering disdain; Mrs. Bland she eyed with absolute contempt. We have no intention of describing Cécile as a perfect character. She was not perfect: we have never yet seen a perfect young lady. But we must remember, in mitigation of her behaviour, that she had gone through much persecution and many troubles of late.

As Geoffrey and Johnnie walked home, they talked for a while about this unfortunate incident, and then both grew silent.

"Geoffrey," said Johnnie, suddenly, "what made Mr. Welman cut me this morning?"

"I don't know. Then you noticed it?" observed Geoffrey, wrathfully.

"Geoffrey," said the other again, "what has made Mrs. Bland so cold when I speak to her?"

"I can't tell. 'Tis very strange. I've been thinking about it all night—that and Mr. Welman. He shall never receive another order from us," he added, indignantly. "However, it's not worth thinking about. The opinion of Mrs. Bland and Mr. Welman cannot be very valuable."

"No, lad; but," he whispered with his old frightened tone in Geoffrey's ear, "they're all so."

"They're all what?" asked his brother.

"They're all changed to me—all the chapel people; even the hands at the mill. They stare at me—not unkindly, you know, but—well, I can't describe it; only, I might be a curiosity from the way in which they look at me."

"It's very odd," said Geoffrey. And, having reached home, they went to bed.

CHAPTER X.

"At the hands of a bishop the first thing looked for is a care of the clergy under him, a care that in doing good they may have whatsoever comforts and encouragements his countenance, authority, and place may yield."—HOOKER.

THERE are still men at the university of the type of Mr. Badley. As fellow of his college he had at various times filled the several offices of junior dean, bursar, vice-president, and lecturer in divinity, and he had successively been elected junior and senior proctor. Through all this period of something like twenty-four years he had lived, or rather burrowed, in the same rooms, with the same pictures on his walls, and the same books on his shelves. He breathed an atmosphere of his own, but it was two thousand years old. His companions were contemporaneous, being certain distinguished Greek and Roman gentlemen, whose idiosyncrasies were far better known to him than those of his own mother.

He was tender-hearted to a fault. He had no money to spare, for all went to aid needy under-

graduates of the twofold class—those who had not enough to pay their way, and those who, having too much, had naturally gone beyond the parental limit. Somehow, it came to be known that all that the bursar had of his own was at the public service, and the public, as the public always does, availed itself of the privilege. Nevertheless, many a mother in retired country parts blessed a friend whom she had never seen. Not for money alone: there were mothers' boys who would have gone quick to ruin but for the hand held out by the bursar of St. Simeon's.

As a proctor he had been a failure, but such a failure that he had been elected a second time. His year of office was truly remarkable. Not a single rustication, and the penalty funds deplorably low. It was whispered that he always gave warning of his approach by a peculiar blowing of his nasal organ, which could be heard at least a hundred yards off. Nevertheless, sundry youths were not ashamed to show to their better friends short missives that had reached their rooms after some gownless expedition on the previous night, wherein lay appeals to certain home associations we need not particularize, but which had made the young delinquent rub his eyes, and wonder what had made him so soft this morning.

The Reverend Thomas Badley was not a theologian. He had not the faintest idea how unorthodox

he had been until he was made a bishop; and even then, and until his dying day, he never knew the worst of himself in that respect. Many a stiff and white-neckerchiefed stickler for precise exegesis of doctrine had shuddered and become spasmodic about the eyes at his seeming careless manner of expressing dogmatic verities. The diocesan had no intention to offend; he knew no better. His first cousin was an under-secretary of state; and when the bursar had received a letter offering him the episcopal gaiters, he wondered who had done it, till his relative told him—a thing he very quickly did, and went on doing till the bishop died, and went on telling the bishop's friends till he, the under-secretary, died; and bequeathed the fact to his children to make the most of in their own day and generation. It had never occurred to the simple don that the chief privilege of secretaries of state is to give their relatives a shove upwards, with the consequent privilege of always reminding them of the fact.

He accepted the bishopric. I don't know exactly why, I am sure, he did not. Probably he thought it was against ecclesiastical etiquette to refuse the office. Possibly he had an inkling that his college would be disappointed if he did not accept laurels which were theirs as well as his, for the principle that we are members of one body is strongly cherished in

our colleges. From the day his cousin told him he had got him the offer of a vacant see, he knew he had done right in accepting it, for it would have been palpably wrong if he had gone out of his way to offend him. The under-secretary had never done him any harm; why should he needlessly hurt his feelings, then?

Would the reader be surprised to learn that he made a good bishop? His exquisite and simple piety carried him safely over the tide of conflicting interests. All his theology was derived from head-quarters—the habit of prayer, and that very rare thing, the study of the Bible, rather than the study of men's interpretations of the Bible. He knew little of commentaries, and less of controversies. His want of precision and exactness in particularizing dogma, and the total absence of that nice and subtle discrimination which marks the average English ecclesiastic, made some of his subordinates sore; and it was quite a customary thing for one of his clergy, when he followed his diocesan in a platform speech, to put the theological carriage on the straight rails again with a kind of "By your leave, my lord;" to which he would bow, smile sweetly, and say, "Quite right."

To the honour of the ladies, be it known, not one of them ever proposed to him. That he should

do so to one of them was out of the question—it had never occurred to him. Had he received an overture by letter, or in person, from one of his female admirers—their name was legion—he would assuredly have consented. He had accepted the bishopric for his cousin the under-secretary's sake; he would have entered matrimony for hers. He passed through all unscathed. He was aware of no danger, and the foe was generous.

The bishop was unlike some of our college dons in one respect—he was good-looking. In respect of the trainers of our youth at the university, I use the term in its general acceptance as referring to the features; in reference to himself, I apply it literally. There was native goodness in the expression that lit up his face. There benignity had made its home; graciousness brooded there. He rarely smiled—what a rare smile it was!—nevertheless, his wide but thin lips were ever on the brink thereof, and threw a tender and sober thoughtfulness over his face, for when he smiled there was a touch of sadness in it. His eyes, a pale blue, reflected rather the soft and dim lustre of the moon than the brilliance of the day; there was no glare in them. Two cloth-yards high he stood, and his clothes became him. Perhaps it may be conjectured from this that the Bishop of Helmstone was handsome as well as good-looking. So he was.

The bishop was a wonderful favourite in his diocese. His kindliness had become a proverb, and his reception of all who came into contact with him was so affable and courteous that all the clergymen's wives were in love with him; and the husbands declared that, if he were only sounder on several important articles of the faith (that is, their faith), and had presented them to that particular prebendary which he had given "to that fellow Crofts—of course each of them had a bugbear in the form of "Crofts" —he would have been the best bishop the diocese had seen for centuries.

At this time, when he was beginning to grow old, he looked really beautiful. He had not the semblance of a stoop; and his hair, plentiful and silvery in its whiteness, was set off against a ruddy countenance, which, saving that there was no bluff upon it, would have done credit to a squire who had ridden to hounds for forty years. He was hale and active yet, and drove in a grand coach, and had a coachman and footman superior in their kind to anything else in the diocese, saving those of the high sheriff, as was right and fitting.

The unostentatious character of the bishop was remarkable. A peculiar custom of his proved this. Instead of being the guest of the patron, or squire, or great men of the place, he invariably chose to stay

with the rector, vicar, or even curate who, for the time being, was interested in his visit. His carriage was put up at the inn, and there the village visited it by stealth, while the coachman and footman lorded it for five bishops at least, and held a kind of ecclesiastic *levée*, the rule being that everybody who sought their company should pay for a drink. In the mean time their master, who knew nought of such doings, and had a vague notion that the footman was a member of a temperance society, would stroll with a silver-headed stick towards the parsonage or rectory, and drop in in time for a cup of tea before the service, where, if he was to preach, he would look round on his rustic audience and bid the lads be respectful to their parents, and the girls not be too fond of ribbons, or it might ultimately lead them into a mischief, and the husbands not stay too long at the tavern, and the wives not gad about too much for gossip; and he would look so kindly and benevolent with it all, and had such a cheery word at the end, that everybody went home, and in talking about the beautiful old man, with his clustering silver hair, forgot his sermon.

It was curious to note how he always seemed most comfortable where the preparations for his coming were the scantiest. He drank his glass of home-brewed as if it were Burgundy, and was quite willing

to try the cabbage pickle if a cold surloin headed the table, sometimes asking for the recipe afterwards. His bedroom always lay on the side of the house that he liked best, and it was wonderful what a view he had discovered from the window in the early morning when he arose. Before he had been an hour in the parsonage the minister's wife found herself telling him about her difficulty with the servant, and Willy and Tommy, who had been consigned to the back kitchen, were climbing his knee, or riding his silver-knobbed stick in the lobby.

There was to be a confirmation at Mr. Haddock's church, and the Bishop of Helmstone was to be their guest for the night. It was understood between the husband and wife that their fate in respect of the new church was to be decided upon this visit. In another six weeks the place would be ready for consecration, and as the preferment would lie in all probability between Mr. Haddock and another, it was only natural to suppose that the bishop would say something definite on the subject.

That other was Mr. and Mrs. Haddock's "Mr. Crofts." Never a more worthy couple than these two, who had ministered, in season and out of season, in a poor parish on a stipend which, if it had kept the wolf from the door, had times out of count seen that same gaunt creature hiding in perilous

proximity thereto. They were a self-denying, noble pair, but they had their "Mr. Crofts," nevertheless. In the present case, too, there was a "Mrs. Crofts," and her whole soul within her had often been roused to indignation upon that lady on the part of Mr. Haddock's most estimable helpmeet.

The Haddocks' "Mr. Crofts" was a middle-aged man, by name Reginald Windermere Sansom, a man who was said by some to be remotely connected with the noble family who bear that name, and by himself to be no further removed than a fourth cousinship. He was not a bad parish worker, and with a certain faction was even a favourite. But Mr. Haddock never referred to him without shaking his head. Mr. Sansom held no definite views; the bishop, it was well known, had, so far as it was possible for a bishop, no definite views either. The deduction in Mr. Haddock's mind was obvious. That fellow Sansom was a "bishop's man." "You will see that man a prebend within two years, mark my words, Charlotte," he would say, when he had heard casually that Sansom had been to episcopal head-quarters to ask if it would be illegal to put a knocker on the vestry door? "There are no men so liable to be toadied as bishops." They had no time "to analyze the motives which brought their subordinates into the episcopal presence, don't you see?" When he

heard that Mr. Sansom had again seen the bishop to say that the knocker looked very nice, but if his lordship entertained any fresh views upon the subject he would have it taken off again, his very soul within him was moved to indignation.

Now, this was a weakness in Mr. Haddock. He himself undoubtedly held definite views, and views, too, which he even prided himself upon being at variance with those of his diocesan. To a few of his fellow-pastors, and in the privacy of his house, he would occasionally relate with evident satisfaction the only conversation of a controversial nature he had ever held with his bishop.

"Is not your view somewhat narrow?" his diocesan had said, with a smile.

"The way is narrow, my lord."

"But the paths are broad that lead into it?"

"That is to reverse the divine order, my lord. The narrow way leadeth into broad and comfortable pastures."

According to Mr. Haddock, his diocesan had seemed somewhat discomposed. He was wont to tell the story in a manner which left no room for doubt that, from his point of view, not merely had he had the best of his lordship, but that, as a man with definite and distinct views, he had administered a delicate rebuke to him.

Certainly Mr. Haddock was not a time-server. He had not been to ask the bishop if he had any episcopal objection to his affixing a knocker of ecclesiastical design on the vestry door. It is unmistakably true, also, that certain men in the Church dearly love to dangle about diocesan chambers, and of course they get talked about. Mr. A. meets Mr. B. (both clergymen), and after a few words about the strange weather for this season of the year, Mr. A. says, "By the way, I saw that fellow Crofts at the diocesan chambers again last Tuesday. He's always hanging about." Mr. B. shrugs his shoulders. "Just what one would expect of that man. But it pays; he'll get something, you see if he don't." Mr. Haddock thought Sansom would get something also. He thought, too, that he was but doing his duty in exposing Mr. Sansom; in reality, he was truckling to the natural man within. It is wonderful how readily we recognize the obligation laid upon our shoulders of discharging a public duty, when the carnal heart agreeth thereto.

But, turning from ecclesiastic affairs to domestic, there was no doubt room for Mrs. Haddock's censures upon Mrs. Sansom's way of conducting her household. To a certain extent this had become a public scandal. It was well known that they were in arrears with their butcher, tailor, and grocer,

and yet they had half again as much income as the Haddocks, and only two children. Twice had certain members of their congregation clubbed together a sum sufficient to set them on their feet again, and yet at this moment they were in debt. Despite these facts, Mrs. Sansom dressed more showily than any other lady in the neighbourhood, and had so utterly overwhelmed Mrs. Haddock with her condescensions when last they met at a mutual acquaintance's, all on the strength of a new brocaded silk of superior pattern, that the poor lady returned home in such indignation that she had to go to bed with a sick headache.

To a certain extent Mrs. Haddock's axiom was a true one—"When the income is a fixed one debt is inexcusable." It was her pride that the wolf referred to above might have his lair in dangerous contiguity to the front door of the parsonage, but he had never found the opportunity of doing more than snuff and snarl at the handle. That had been inexorably turned against his entrance. There had been times when, after she had paid all her debts to the shops around, she had been left with a literal penny in her pocket; but then the penny was there, and the debts had been paid. And she had calculated to that same single penny.

Bishops were not such common sights a few years

ago as they are now, and there was considerable stir in Lackington on the day of the confirmation. As he entered the church with Mrs. Haddock on his arm, the yard was filled with a large and orderly crowd of spectators.

"I towd you so," said one man, sufficiently loud for the episcopal ear. "I wur sartain as they was chosen for their looks. Eh, but he'll be a archbishop, he will."

"Looks is deceitful, Coggins," said an attendant at Zion.

"Well, you have a smooth face, there's no denying that, Briggs," said another, who did not go anywhere.

"It's the inner man as we must look into," said Briggs.

"Not sich a easy job that, I should say," rejoined the man who went nowhere, "else I should ha' bin cured o' my liver complaint long afore this. He can't get at it, that's what th' doctor's allus saying."

"You speak after the flesh," said Briggs, with a look of pitiful commiseration.

"Ain't unnat'ral wi' a liver complaint. But, flesh or no flesh, he's a winsome face. I think I s'all go in and yeer what he's got to say to them childer."

"So shall I," said a middle-aged man in dirty fustian. "He never speaks more nor twelve or fifteen minutes, they do say."

"Truckling to human infirmity!" muttered Briggs.

"What's that you say?" said the first speaker.

"I wur only observing as bishops is but men."

"Coom, coom, gentlemen, that's going a lettle too far, you know," objected a voice in the rear; and Isaac Curling came up, with his prayer-book under his arm.

Isaac was in ecstasies: this was just such an occasion as he loved. The formalist would as soon have thought of giving up his studies in heraldry as missing an opportunity of seeing a bishop.

"It's putting it rey-thur strong, I mun confess," said Coggins. "Respect the cloth, that's what I say."

"The cloth!" said an ally of Briggs's, contemptuously. "Perhaps you've never yeerd o' sheep's clothing?"

"And wolves?" added Briggs, fearing the point might be lost.

"What have you got on yeself but sheep's clothing?" asked the man who had the liver complaint; "only th' wool ha' bin combed, and dyed, and wove into a cloth o' grey mixture." He looked at Briggs's unmentionables. "That's deceit, if I may be allowed a oppinion. It's bad enough for th' wolf to envelop hisself i' wool; but when he turns weaver too, it shows a extent o' nat'ral deceitfulness as is shocking to think on."

When the service was over the bishop returned to the parsonage. He had to pass up a narrow aisle of living souls as he left the vestry door and strode through the yard and across the street. Without his having looked at any particular individual every one thought he had smiled upon them personally. There was that peculiar irradiation about his half-parted lips that there is around a lighted candle; it is impartial, and it illumines all. There was a loud cheer as he entered the house. He turned, bowed with a simple and dignified grace, and went in.

"If looks wurna so deceitful, I should say as he was a converted man," said Briggs, turning homeward with his new-found friend. "He's a hevinly expression."

"I canna say. Everything's agen him, o' course. He's a camel, that's what he is!"

"He's a—what do you say?" said the astonished Briggs.

"He's a camel," rejoined his friend sagely, and not displeased that the other was mystified; "and episcopacy is the needle's eye."

"P'raps," said Briggs, vexed that he had not caught at the figure more quickly. "It's rey-thur far-fetched, but it'll do."

"A thing as is good is worth going a long way for," said the other, with an air of complacency.

Briggs and his friend parted at the corner of the street, and the former, when he reached home, hinted to his wife that he feared that man Barnaby's spiritual condition was not healthy. Pride had fast hold of him, and it would require a good deal of prayer to loose him—"which we mun pray for him," he added, with a look of pious determination.

"Your work seems to be progressing, Mr. Haddock. I was very much struck with the attention paid to my address by the children."

Mr. Haddock was a good man and an earnest—have I not already said so?—yet his instant thought was, "That fellow Sansom would have immediately answered that such an address would have commanded the stilled attention of a thousand children." He would sooner have his right arm wrung from its socket than do so.

"I am glad your lordship was pleased," he said, quietly.

"I was very pleased. The congregation, too, were sober and orderly. It is a long time for them to wait, and as they have no part in it themselves to take, it is all the more remarkable. Your children are not coming in to supper—gone to bed, I suppose?" He had turned to Mrs. Haddock.

"Yes; I was afraid they would trouble your lordship."

"Not at all. I am very fond of children, very fond indeed." And he looked so and was so. "By the way," he added, as if the thought had just struck him, "I shall be in your neighbourhood again in a few weeks. The church at the west suburb is fast approaching completion. It will be a nice position for a devoted and earnest-minded man."

"It is generally looked upon in the town as an eligible post," said Mrs. Haddock, with a faint flutter in her heart.

"Can you—it is just as well perhaps the children are gone to bed, after all—can you tell me what is the general opinion regarding Mr. Sansom? Is he a good worker?"

"I believe him to be not only a hard worker, but methodical in the use of his time," replied the parson, firmly. Mrs. Haddock well-nigh groaned.

"I am glad to hear it. 'To redeem the time'—that is a very important injunction. And, may I ask in confidence, is he liked among his people?"

"I have a little difficulty in answering that question, my lord. It is a strange fact, but I fear it is a fact that there is a proneness among a pastor's flock, when speaking to him, to depreciate the work and service of a neighbouring shepherd. It is the old spirit of faction—the tendency of one Church and congregation to look upon the other as its rival.

Parochial boundaries have failed to eliminate this feeling. Parochial boundaries cannot limit the laity; each goes to the church he likes best, and when it happens that he has to cross the line to do so, there is an immediate tendency to opposition."

"Too true, I fear."

"Thus, I have heard expressions of dislike towards Mr. Sansom; but I am bound to add that such expressions are, in many cases, the mere utterances of those who are dissatisfied by turns with everything. Such people, you know, abound in every parish, and one has to be cautious in accepting their statements."

"I know the class you refer to well," said the bishop.

"On the other hand, I know that Mr. Sansom is very much esteemed by certain members of his congregation." Mr. Haddock did not add that the church had become well-nigh empty since the last failure of the clergyman to meet his expenses.

"I am obliged to you for your candour. It encourages me to ask, further, if you can explain to me how it has come to pass that they have been pecuniarily involved? Some very harsh expressions have come to my ears relative to this sad affair. I have been told that there is no prudence shown in the management of the household, that they live high, and that there is no attempt made to keep

within their means. Do you happen to know whether this is true or not?"

"I do not know the Sansoms well enough to speak from personal observation," said the parson. "The living, of course, is a small one."

"True. These are expensive times, no doubt."

"Very expensive," said Mrs. Haddock, out of the fulness of her own bitter experience. The bishop took her words as relative to the Sansoms.

"Some of the livings in the district are very small. You seem very comfortable here, Mr. Haddock—very comfortable. I am pleased with everything I have seen. I am sure the work is prospering."

Then they had prayers, and then they went to bed.

"A nice couple these Haddocks," mused his lordship, as he divested himself of his apron. "Private means, of course—impossible to keep things so comfortable as this on their stipend." He looked round the room as he uttered this remark. To a man it appeared luxurious; a woman would have recognized a woman's thrift, a woman's taste, and a woman's neatness—nothing more. "They have less than Sansom, and more children. It is a wise thing for a clergyman to secure, if practicable, a little additional help besides that which comes to him from his church. Too much is as serious a peril as too

little. The one breeds laziness, the other despair; each is detrimental to a man's usefulness. Just a sufficiency—enough to give the mind rest, and allow it freely to concentrate its energies on its proper work—that is the great thing. She is a good woman, too, and Haddock has done well. Had circumstances been otherwise, I should have felt bound to give this church to him. As it is, and after what he has said, I shall offer the place to Sansom. I dare say the world has maligned him, and, in any case, it will set him on his feet and give him another chance. What a comfortable pillow this is!"

The next morning the bishop asked for pen and paper, and ere he had left the parsonage he had indited a letter to Mr. Sansom, offering him the preferment. He did not go, however, without assuring the Haddocks of his deep regard for them, and his satisfaction that things were going so comfortably with them in mind, body, and estate.

Poor Mr. and Mrs. Haddock! What with the anxiety of the one not to take advantage of his opportunity, and the thrifty neatness of the other, they had lost that which would have freed them from worry for the rest of their lives.

What a pity Mrs. Bishop, when there is one, does not sometimes accompany his lordship on his journeys, and that she has not a legal voice in some

of his preferments! A woman would never have made the mistake of that day.

But we are living in better days. The diocese of Helmstone is not so big by half as it was then. The Bishop of Cottenham now superintends the well-being of Lackington, and of him everybody knows. That he can compass the inner, as well as the outer, needs of his subordinates, who shall doubt?

CHAPTER XI.

"'Tis my sole plague to be alone:
I am a beast, a monster grown:
I will no light nor company:
I find it now my misery:
The scene is turned, my joys are gone;
Fear, discontent, and sorrows come."

DEMOCRITUS JUNIOR.

OUR story has made its way into the middle of a second volume, and yet the owner of Grewby Park can scarcely be said to have become properly introduced to its readers. He was individually referred to at the outset as one who had been more or less a recluse, under the influence of that sad calamity which, while it made him heir to, nay, possessor of, Grewby, had reminded him also that he was the last direct representative of a stock whose lineal succession had been unbroken for centuries. The strange morbidity which affected Mr. Grewby from such a reflection must be my excuse for the apparent slight. He was a man who, from the hour

he succeeded to the family honours, had no more to do with the world. He did not actually sever his connection with Lackington, but all his relations with the neighbourhood were conducted without his house by his steward, and within by his butler. Upon these two he seemed to lay the burden of all his living responsibility. For several years after his brother's untimely death, he had even closed the gates of the park from the public entry. This had been a cause of great soreness in its day. Grewby Park was unique in its beauty—in its undulating park-land, in its noble trees, in its pathway leading parallel with the meandering Scudd, in its woodland hollows, in its views of the house from all points of the compass. And Lackington people on Saturdays, and such other holidays as went by the calendar, had been so accustomed to betake themselves thither, that unspoken permission had lapsed, in their eyes, into prescriptive right.

The name of Grewby would indeed have got into ill odour had it not been for Hooper the butler, and Cooper the steward. How they had brought him round to the popular view, none but themselves were aware; that they, and they alone, had done it was known to all. If it were not that popularity is a fleeting favour, these two would have been men of repute in the town to all time. For a few months

they trod a pathway of flowers, scented with that peculiar perfume which, while it gratifies the taste, intoxicates the sense. I do not mean to say that pride of position had solely brought about those after prejudices of Lackington against Messrs. Hooper and Cooper. No, the crowd is fickle; therefore its love is capricious. It was soon discovered that the butler and steward intended that all other favours also to be obtained from the master of Grewby must be sought through them. If a subscription was wanted, it was found that the purse-strings were in their hands; if a chairmanship was needed for some local undertaking, one of these two must be first approached; if a special picnic on unauthorized days was in intention, the steward must be consulted; if a party of sightseers wished to inspect the old oaken balustrade, or the polished staircase, or the panelled rooms, the butler must be sued, and he always said "No." It was in vain to write direct to Mr. Grewby. His answer was brief; they must see Mr. Hooper or Mr. Cooper, as the case might be.

One peculiarity in this position of affairs struck the Lackington people very much, and while it struck it irritated them. These two never seemed jealous of one another; they worked harmoniously. An apprehension of rivalship would have set the neighbouring outer world on its legs again. A

mutual distrust, an uneasy vigilance of one over the actions and pretensions of the other, would have recovered for Lackington its lost ground. They could have gone to work against the butler through the medium of the steward; they could have set up the house against the park. But such scheming, strange to say, was impossible. The two worked with a dogged and determined concord. This was irritating, as I have said—very. It was irritating as militating against the acknowledged theory—a theory upheld staunchly in Lackington circles, as well religious as secular—that jealousy burns in every heart, and that the smouldering stubble is only awaiting a draught of air to burst into a flame. Public opinion was bent on seeing these two afire; but they refused martyrdom. Evidently they did not feel called upon to bear witness to crotchets. They did not seem to know what jealousy meant. It is just possible that individual interest compelled to mutual agreement. Judging by personal observation, I do not think this was the case; but it is fair to suggest it.

Mr. Grewby realized one advantage from this state of things: his ebbing popularity began to flow in with a rapid tide. Everybody began to recall his past trouble, his natural peculiarities, his loneliness, his isolation. He had been caught in the wiles of two enterprising and cunning men. They

began to pity him. Whatever he did that was objectionable to the Lackington mind was the deed of the men in whose toils he had been ensnared. And the more they pitied the master the more they hated his administrators. The names of these two men stank in the nostrils of the townspeople. They were anathematized in private and public, over tea and over beer, all because they would not anathematize one another. They had even been mobbed, for no better reason than that they persisted in not mobbing themselves. In the end it came to pass that they were more detested for their agreements than their decrees. So objectionable is he who will not alter his own practices to corroborate his neighbour's theories.

The one great shortcoming of Mr. Grewby's life was unanimously set down to the malevolence of his two satellites. He had remained a bachelor. It is curious how many men, upon whom depends the continuance or extinction of their line, and who are proud of their lineage, will deliberately face a childless life. Mr. Grewby was not a bear; he did not become sore at the sight of a woman. None so gentle or gracious to the sex as the master of Grewby; and to see him bow—he was nearly six feet high, and straight as a dart—was a sight indeed! But he never sought a woman's society voluntarily.

And the ladies of the neighbourhood would never have forgiven him, had it not been that, to a woman, they were convinced that it was all due to those odious creatures, Hooper the butler, and Cooper the steward. These two were afraid for the continuance of their power; they dreaded lest a mistress should be less complaisant than a master; and, so far as the ladies of the neighbourhood were concerned, they were right to be thus apprehensive. There was not one who had not vowed a vow that, if she ever was set at the head of Grewby Park, she would oust that wretch Hooper at the earliest date consistent with a respect for such an old-established weakness of her lord and master. As for that horrible man the steward, he could not be kept out of the park; but she would see what could be done to keep him out of all parts of the house, saving the audit-room.

This sounds as if every young lady, or lady who had reached "the twilight of dubiety," or even middle-aged lady, had set her cap at Mr. Grewby. Ask the question of themselves, and they scorned the impeachment with astonished indignation; ask them the question of each other, and without a single exception they had all laid, as they had had opportunity, a snare wherein to catch the owner of Grewby Park and its many acres. They had been foiled by the sharpness and discernment of Hooper and

Cooper. Not that any gratitude was displayed for this. Certain personal reminiscences in every case put the stopper on that gracious attribute.

By this time, however, the question of Mr. Grewby's marriage had ceased to be a matter of curious speculation among the ladies of Lackington. Those who had been bent on seizing that gentleman for their own had ogled in vain. Those who would have been willing, but had sighed less publicly, had now settled down into caps and fronts, and had done with vanities; or, maybe, they were the buxom mothers of four, six, or nine children, as the case might be. It was now known that Mr. Grewby would die a bachelor, and that with his death the house and direct lineage of the Grewbys was to come to an end. Everybody was sorry for this, apart from personal reasons; and everybody laid the blame on Hooper and Cooper.

On the whole, Mr. Grewby's life had run smoothly for many a long year past. If he had not known any great happiness, he had not fallen upon any great melancholy. His pulse was equal, his habits regular, his temper even. The only objection to his manner of life was its monotony; and, hitherto, it did not seem to have struck him that such a life as he was leading would have driven nineteen men out of twenty into a suicide or an asylum.

Everything at Grewby went by the clock, and the clock they went by never lost more than forty seconds in the month. Men who live thus rigidly are the most peevish men in the world. It is they who never forgive a breached engagement nor forget to recall it. They are the men who have run their pen through a legatee's name for coming into dinner after grace has been said. No further grace had been allowed. Mr. Grewby had even greater excuse for irritability. He had nobody to scold; no one to wait dinner for; almost no one to leave out of his will; nothing to make the subject of a complaint. His meals were prepared to the fraction of a second; the soup was never burnt; the gravy was always in the chop; his ale was clear; his potatoes were browned exactly as he liked them; the cheese he favoured, and the part of that cheese he favoured, was ever there. Perhaps there never was a man set in such a position to predispose irritability as Mr. Grewby. But against these frightful odds he had for years come forth placid, calm, and full of gentleness, almost womanly in his tender serenity.

About this time—I mean the time at which our story has arrived—Mr. Grewby had become somewhat less tranquil. I do not think he was aware of it himself for some length of time; I am not sure that his administrators perceived it at first; nevertheless, it

was so. He was not discontented, but he began to feel lonely. Such an undisturbed atmosphere had come to be oppressive. He would have taken Hooper and Cooper into his confidence on the subject earlier, if he had not had a slight dread of them both—chronic of his butler, whom he saw every day; intermittent of his steward, whose visits were bi-weekly.

I believe Mr. Grewby began to be sorry that he had not married, not so much for the sake of having a wife, but that he might have heard children's voices. An echo of sweet laughter in the hall, the light quick tread of youth on the staircase—these had been unknown since himself was a boy. But sometimes, when he sat over his cheese and pippins, his memory would go back—what a long way back it seemed!—into past days; and he did not even smile at the recollection of his boyish freaks or his brother's merry face, for Time had covered the one with sanctity, and Death had cast the other into its deep sleep. I will not say he never smiled; but the lip as it parted quivered also, and a misty dew would gather stealthily to his eyelids, which he never dared to wipe away for fear it should whisper to him that he had been crying.

When Hooper and Cooper discovered that their master's reflections were beginning to grow wholly

retrospective, and that retrospection did not tend to maintain that equanimity of thought and habit which had been his for so long a period, they put their heads together, and the result of such a conjunction was, of course, a capital one. This new melancholy must be at once dispelled. The best remedy would be an occasional dinner-party, provided Mr. Grewby did not disturb his digestion by eating any of the strange dishes which would have to be served up. But this, as Cooper said, was Hooper's care; and, as Hooper said, Cooper was quite right, and he would see to it.

I am not sure that the dinner-parties would have done much for Mr. Grewby's disorder. But they had no chance as an experiment, for about this time a letter to that gentleman in a strange handwriting brought about a sufficient revolution.

The very morning after the party, of which our friend Mr. Ebenezer Emlott formed one, the letter came. Mr. Grewby was at his breakfast, and when the post-bag was brought in, the butler, as was his wont, took out the letters, and arranged them in the order of their size, the newspapers lying at the base.

"I don't know this hand, nohow," he said, as he stood at the sideboard, speaking half to himself and half to his master.

"Is it a letter?" asked his master, without turning round.

"Yes—from Bombay."

"Bombay!" exclaimed Mr. Grewby, with wide-mouthed astonishment.

Hooper could take innumerable liberties, but he had never got so far yet as to open his master's letters. He was very curious—so curious that he gave the letter by itself to Mr. Grewby, leaving the others on the sideboard.

"I don't know any one in India, nor ever did; saving, to be sure, Jack Milton. But he's been dead—let me see, it must be this six or seven years now—killed in that skirmish at Mugglepore. Fine fellow, Jack; the liveliest, heartiest, and most generous lad you would meet with in a lifetime, sir. He and poor Geordie got their lieutenancies together." The old gentleman had got into a way of talking his reflections.

"If it's not him, you'd better see who 'tis," put in Hooper, somewhat brusquely. He had not seen a letter whose superscription he did not recognize for four or five years; he was all aflame with curiosity.

"Yes, that'll be the best—the only way to settle it," assented his master, as if the idea was not only feasible, but quite new to him.

I have said Hooper dared not go so far as to

open Mr. Grewby's letters. But he did not object to looking over his master's shoulder. It read as follows:—

"Bombay, Feb. 15, 18—.

"MY DEAR SIR,

"This letter, I fear, will scarce reach you before Miss Minnie Milton, as she goes to England by the same mail. She is seven years of age, and daughter to Colonel Milton, who fell at Mugglepore. His widow—I presume you are aware that the colonel was married—died in my house last Thursday fortnight. She said with her latest breath that she had herself no friend, and her child's father only one—yourself. Miss Minnie has about ten pounds a year through her deceased mother, and I shall be glad to act as her agent in the matter, the income itself being derived from rents in this city.

"I am, Sir, your obliged servant,

"WILLIAM MACINTYRE.

"P.S.—Last year Miss Milton's receipts were in English value £6 5*s.* 11*d.* But property is going up, and I think ten pounds may be realized in course of time. We must hope so."

"Well, he's a cool un," said Hooper, with suppressed wrath.

"He assumes that the claim of friendship will be acknowledged, that is all. I like the letter."

"Like the letter!" cried out the amazed butler.

"Yes. I like the unquestioning trust that I shall be true to my brother's friend's memory," said his master, decidedly.

"What! you don't mean to say as you'll take in the child?"

"Certainly."

"We mun see Mr. Cooper, you know, first, sir. He's the one to give a calm and practical opinion on a subject o' this magnitude," repeated Hooper, trying to gain time. This might be a serious business.

"Oh yes, we must see Cooper, of course—that's understood," answered Mr. Grewby, with a satisfaction in his tone which as much alarmed as it astonished his attendant. "Are there any other letters?"

"Only two besides the newspapers. One fro' Barnham about the new saddle, and the other i' Mr. Bradford's hand—receipt for subscription towards the alterations i' the chancel, I suppose. Why, here's another!" he said in unmixed astonishment; "from London too. Who can that be from?"

Mr. Grewby opened it. Again Hooper looked over his shoulder.

"29, Charles Street, Holborn.

"MY DEAR SIR,

"By the request of my friend, Mr. W. Macintyre, I took charge of Mrs. Milton's daughter when I left India, and I have now the pleasure of stating that she is with me in the house noted above. I shall put her into one of the Great North-Western coaches to-morrow morning. A friend of mine, travelling Glasgow way, has promised to transfer her to a Lackington coach at Manchester. Perhaps you will kindly give orders that she be met at the Unicorn.

"I am, yours obediently,

"JAMES MACINTOSH."

"I never see sich assurance i' all my life!" cried Hooper.

"I like these men, Macintosh and Macintyre; their confidence is quite touching. It shall not be misplaced," said the old man firmly, not to say cheerfully. He was actually rubbing his hands.

"We mun ha' Mr. Cooper in at wunst, sir. He's a shrewd man; he knows what's what, he do!"

"Yes, yes; we'll see Cooper, of course. In the mean while, tell Catharine to have the green room thoroughly aired and made ready for visitors. What time does the Manchester coach get in?"

"At eight o'clock, when it's punctual; but I'll

just run to Mester Cooper, and let him know all about it."

"Don't forget to tell Catharine."

This was Catharine Banyer. She had been promoted from the lodge to the housekeeper's place. We have already stated this.

"Shall I tell her first, or wait till I ha' seen Mr. Cooper?"

"First, to be sure. Do you think a bedroom can be aired in five minutes which hasn't been slept in for three years?"

Hooper went out of the room in a maze; he had never been answered after this fashion for a length of time he did not care to calculate. He looked gloomy as he entered Cooper's cottage at the park gate; and that worthy did not appear much more cheerful when the news was related to him in all its details, especially when Mr. Grewby's conduct, which the butler had reserved for the end, had been described with perhaps an extra pinch of exaggeration.

Whatever resolve was come to by these two worthies, one thing was certain—they had determined not to frustrate the entrance of the little girl into the house. I presume they came to the sensible conclusion that any such attempt was futile as being too late. She was even now on the way.

CHAPTER XII.

"*Lor.* Madam, they are not yet :
But there is come a messenger before,
To signify their coming."

The Merchant of Venice.

MR. GREWBY'S heart went forth to meet the orphan from the moment he received his two letters. If any one had hinted to him that the little child had been most unceremoniously thrust upon him, he would have resented the suggestion as unworthy of consideration. It did not occur to him that what would have been a strange act on the part of his brother's old and deceased friend in behalf of his infant child, became a still more strange deed when it was done by a woman whom he had never seen in his life, and who had, personally, not the vestige of a claim upon him. Reflections like these never entered his brain ; even in the recesses of his heart they had not the faintest chance of a place.

He seemed to have discovered all at once that he had been a very miserable man for many years.

He must have been slowly drifting into hypochondria without knowing it. There was no telling what might not have happened to him but for this heaven-sent gift of a little child to cheer his old age, to soothe his declining years, to bring back a little freshness to a life which had been passed in the dull monotony of an unvarying routine.

He thanked God heartily for the living bounty that had been bestowed upon him. It seemed to him like an answer to a petition which had been raised, and yet not raised; for in his prayers he had never hinted of this—never hinted that now, in his old age, he had begun to feel lone, and had fallen into a quiet despondency. He had never been morose in his prayers; he had not asked for many blessings; above all, he had never specified his wants to God. The Most High knew what he needed best. He left the selection of gifts entirely to His judgment. And yet he could not but think, somehow, that an unspoken and even unthought-of supplication had gone forth from his lonely heart, and that, all undeemed of himself as it had been, God had heard it out of heaven, and answered it with this little child.

An object in life had been presented to him. No sooner had Catharine entered the room, than he was at her.

"Which room do you think is the more cheerful, the green or the bay-window?"

"For a visitor, I suppose, sir?"

"Ay, Kitty, a visitor indeed; a long visit, please God!" The master was quite merry. Catharine was pleased.

"It depends whether they're young or old. It's a gentleman, of course?"

"Wrong, Catharine; it's a lady—a little lady, too, not more than seven years old!"

"Dear me! Who can it be, now? It's not Captain Gawthorpe's niece as lives wi' him?"

"No; wrong again! But it's no good your guessing. Do you remember Lieutenant Milton?"

"Not Mr. George's friend?"

The master nodded assent, and they were both silent for a moment. Catharine had been about the house and family from her birth, and knew many things that others did not.

"Our visitor has come all the way from India. She is the lieutenant's daughter—he seems to have married late in life—and she will live with us as long as God shall bless us with her presence. I know she will be a blessing; I have a strange conviction on the subject."

Catharine's wonder was great at the master's satisfaction. "He little knows what a revolution this

will make in the house," she said to herself. "Anyhow, if it cheers him up, and brings a bit o' life about his hearth, I shallna begrudge the extra work."

"I shall look to you to take charge of her, Catharine. She must be under your care."

"What'll Mr. Hooper say?" said the housekeeper, in a somewhat significant tone.

"I can't be sure what Hooper may say; but one thing I am sure about—she must be kindly treated, and she must be in a woman's hands. You will undertake this responsibility, Catharine?" He spoke almost in a pleading tone. "You knew her father, and you can remember who was her father's greatest friend."

Catharine brushed a tear from her eye.

"I would do anything for Mr. George's sake; but what is left for me to do in this world I do for his brother's sake, the kindest o' masters." She took the old gentleman's hand in her two hands for one moment, and pressed it tightly.

"You've been a faithful servant to me, in one capacity or another, Catharine. I do not know what I have done to deserve such service."

"This will be a great change for you, sir; I suppose you know that?"

"A change for the better, I trust."

"I hope so. She'll want a governess, you know."

"A governess!"

"A governess to educate her. I could see to it as she learnt her Catechism and th' backstitch, and said her prayers regular, and was dressed clean. But that's not all. She mun be taught the pianoforty and the French langwidge. Not as I set value o' their talk; it's so frivolous like. But she mun do as others does, and they all learns French. Then she mun understand summut about jography, and the—the use o' the globes," she added knowingly, for she had seen this latter accomplishment mentioned in the advertisements to their weekly newspaper, and always wondered what it meant.

"Dear me! I hadn't thought about governesses."

At this stage there was a rap at the door, and ere a response could be given, in walked Hooper and Cooper. They were both middle-aged men, or perhaps a shade on the wrong side of middle age. They were dressed in drab breeches and gaiters. Here all point of similarity ended. Hooper was very short and barrelly, his legs looking rather like props than legs. To look at him you would have thought that Nature had never intended him to walk, but always to be on the stand—like one of his own casks. As for upsetting him, that was out of the question. Cooper was tall and alarmingly slim. You would have feared to blow a candle out in front of

him, in terror lest the extra current might knock him down. He oscillated, too, in a manner that at first filled you with a generous impulse to run up to him and assist him to recover a position at right angles with the carpet; but somehow he always righted himself without assistance, and you got used to it. For the rest, Hooper was red-faced and hairless; Cooper was lanky-haired and pale: the butler was thick-voiced and wheezy and stertorous; a snipe could not have talked in a thinner tone than the steward.

"Good mornin', sir," said Cooper.

"Good morning, sir," said Hooper, as though he had never seen his employer since yesterday.

"This is news indeed," cried the steward.

"Glorious, isn't it?" rejoined Mr. Grewby, rubbing his hands in an ecstasy.

"We cannot forecast the future, but we may be permitted to hope so, sir. I think it is not derogating too much fro' Providence to go so far as that. What do you think, Mr. Hooper?"

"We mun be careful not to fly i' the face o' Providence, that's certain," answered the butler, in a deep and melancholy bass. You would have imagined Diogenes with such a voice if he had spoken out of the bung-hole of his tub.

"Careful indeed!" exclaimed Catharine. "There's

a risk o' flouting Providence, I suppose, i' protecting a fatherless and motherless child fro' want?"

"She's only seven years old," added Mr. Grewby, apologetically, giving Catharine at the same time a nudge expressive of encouragement.

"It's young, sartinly," said Cooper. "Don't you think it's young, Mr. Hooper?"

"No doubt it's young, and we're all getting old. Therefore, is it the place for a young child?—that's the p'int. That's the p'int, I think, Mr. Cooper?" and the little tubby man reached up his hand to the long thin man's waist, like an infant Bacchus grasping a churchwarden pipe.

"Just so," assented the pipe.

"But she'll be here in a few hours. We can't prevent her coming now," said the owner of Grewby.

"The question whether Grewby'll suit her is the foolishest question as ever was axed me, save one;" and Catharine looked at the butler. He, red-faced as he was, went redder than a lobster, and was seized with such a violent attack of coughing, that conversation was impossible for five minutes at least.

"He'll come to shortly," said the housekeeper, slyly.

"Perhaps it was a thoughtless kind o' question, after all, seeing as how she is all but here. What do you say, Mr. Cooper?" He glanced upward at

the thin man's face with a somewhat apprehensive look.

"There's no 'p'raps' about it. Never yeard a softer question i' all my born days." He glanced back very sternly at the butler. "You've bin a-keeping of a secret from me, Mr. Hooper."

"Oh dear me, not at all," cried the affrighted man, giving a sidelong and imploring look to Catharine.

"I doubt me it's true."

"Never no secrets atwixt friends, you know, Mr. Cooper."

"That's more oftener what ought to be nor what is," said the steward sententiously. "However, that's a matter as'll keep. Meantime I think we may consider as it's settled as the child comes. I hope it'll prove a blessing to all as is concerned," he added, sanctimoniously.

"I'm sure of it," said the pleased old gentleman. "Catharine thinks the bay-window will be the most suitable room, and she will herself in future occupy the press-room. There is a door between the two."

"That might do, sartinly," said the butler, as if weighing the matter carefully in his mind.

"It is opposite my own room, and that is important, you know. I should hear if anything went wrong. I'm a very light sleeper."

Mr. Grewby amazed his servants, Catharine in-

cluded. He was already a totally different man under this new excitement. If anticipation had thus roused him, what would not the realization do?

"We mustn't have you losing your sleep, sir, all for a skriking child. I'll see you've no occasion to get up," Catharine said.

The two retainers departed after a few more remarks had been made. Their objection had been purely formal. They had been in the Grewby councils for so long that it had never occurred to them that their master could dream of making up his mind on a subject of such magnitude as the reception of a new and permanent resident at Grewby without first taking them into his consultations.

But a storm had been brewing—such a storm as would have pleased the Lackington people immensely had they seen the gathering clouds. But the horizon was beyond their ken.

"Mr. Hooper"—the fat little man looked instantly thoughtful; he knew what was coming—"I hope I knows my place."

"No one better, Mr. Cooper. If I've said it wunst I've said it a hunnerd times. I've said, 'The finest p'int i' Mr. Cooper's character, and that's saying a great deal, that is, is this—he knows his place. He never interferes i' work as isn't his dooty to interfere in.'"

"It's true, whether you meant it or no."

"Upon my honour, Mr. Cooper, it's true;' and to prove it, Mr. Hooper laid his hand dramatically upon the most rotund part of his stomach. Evidently, he meant to infer that his honour was there, and that he could answer for its presence if required.

"I knows my place, Mr. Hooper. I've said it; you've admitted it—maybe 'twas under pressure, maybe not. But the question now arises, does you know yours?"

"Mr. Cooper, can you ask me?" The pit of Mr. Hooper's stomach was again appealed to. Perhaps his honour was not so safe this time, for he kept his hand there for a considerable interval.

"You an' me's never quarrelled yet, Mr. Hooper, and I hope we's not agoin' to begin now. The park is my place; the house is yourn; but it mun be understood as there's to be no coortin' of Mistress Catharine—there, now!"

"Who's a-coortin' of Mrs. Catharine, I should like to know?"

"You are."

"Well, if I am, who's to stop me? She dunna belong to th' park; she's part an' parcel o' th' house. You ax any lawyer, he'll tell you." Mr. Hooper stretched his little legs out till they looked like a pair of tressels. He thought he had scored a point.

"I'm sorry to have to say it of one as I've knowed and worked alongside of for so many years, but it's true; you've been playing a mean and despicabull part, Mr. Hooper."

"Coom, coom, that's putting it raythur too strong, you know, that is, Mr. Cooper."

"It's true. You know as well as you know you're inclined to corpilency that me and Mrs. Catharine has as good as made it up."

"You and Mrs. Catharine made it up!" gasped Bacchus.

"*As good* as made it up, I said, Mr. Hooper. Your expressing of astonishment is gammon; you knowed it."

"Knowed it. Why, she boxed your ears only week afore last, for just pinching o' her arm!" exclaimed Hooper.

"That's her play, that is. Why, man, you don't know nowt about coortin', you don't. They allus does that when they favours you. It's a sure sign, that is."

"She's boxed my ears twice this week already," said the butler, with an air of triumph.

The steward looked discomposed. "It depends entirely how it's done, Mr. Hooper. There's two ways o' going about a thing, 'specially i' coortin'."

"So there is," assented the butler, who did not

like all the knowledge to be on one side—it gave the steward a visible advantage. "So there is."

"I've seen boxes on th' side o' th' yed for a bit of a liberty, as meant nowt else but a invitation to do it agen."

"So have I. It's a way they have. I knows it well."

"I've seen boxes, too, regular crumpers, as needed no meaning at all. Fellows keeps clear on 'em arterwards. Perhaps you know summat abowt them, too?"

"No, but I'll take your word for it; you've had more experience nor me, Mr. Cooper," said the butler, with an air of studied humility.

"Experiences or no experiences, Mr. Hooper, I hope you now knows what's expected o' you," said the steward, with deliberate emphasis.

"What's expected of me?" asked the fat man in a tone that was meant to imply that he had not the remotest idea to what Mr. Cooper was referring.

"You'll remember the Ninth Commandment, and not covet what isna yourn."

"She's not your wife."

"She's going to be."

"Has she promised you?"

"You don't know nowt about these kind o' things, Mr. Hooper," responded the assured recipient of Mrs. Catharine's favours, with a pitiful glance at his

corpulent friend. "There is things as is understood when nothing's bin said. This is a extremely common thing i' coortin'."

"So it is."

"Mrs. Catherine and me understands one another; and should you, Mr. Hooper, attempt to coom atwixt us, I shall look upon you as a mean and despicabull vill'in."

"Mr. Cooper!" a voice cried from the conservatory door.

"You see how she calls to me. Any fellow as had experience could detect the tone o' that vice. It speaks vollums, it does.—I'm cooming, Mrs. Catherine, I am," he added aloud, and hurried forward, craning his neck over the hedge at the same time to catch a look of the charmer.

"You great daft idiot, staring i' that roads—where's them apples?"

"I'm going, Mrs. Catharine, at wunst, I am.—She's only in play," he whispered to the butler. "She knows as I understands her."

"Pretty strong for play," said the inwardly-delighted Mr. Hooper.

"What have Providence provided you wi' spindles i'stead of legs for, if it's not to go twice as quick as other folk?" called out the housekeeper, in a shrill voice.

"I'm going, Mrs. Catharine.—A requited attachment makes conversation so free and easy, Mr. Hooper, doesn't it?"

"Seems so," said the butler dryly.

"Very. Good mornin'. I'm sorry for you, Mr. Hooper; but you must bear it like a man. There must be disap'intments i' this life."

"Who's had a disap'intment?"

"Oh, it's all right! I thought I'd better let you know. You understands your place now."

"I understands nowt o' t' sort," said the butler, looking after his coadjutor.

Meanwhile the steward pursued his way to the orchard.

CHAPTER XIII.

"An I had but one penny in the world, thou should'st have it to buy gingerbread."—*Love's Labour's Lost.*

As evening drew near, Mr. Grewby grew but more and more excited. If he went once into the bay-window room, he went a dozen times. He was a sore impediment to Catharine in her housewifely efforts to take away from the gloom that more or less attached to this as to all the other chambers in the house. She had removed several ancient chairs of black oak, and placed in their stead those of a lighter and more modern manufacture. The heavy damask curtains had given way to white dimity; and before she had concluded her labours, she had relieved the room of much of the sombre aspect which had for so long prevailed therein.

The old gentleman himself had mounted a step-ladder to remove the family portraits, so faded and musty, that only the eyes and cheeks and mob-cap of one old lady were visible; but he was persuaded at last

to relinquish his task, and let Catharine do it. But he could not be still. While she was thus occupied, he was searching diligently an old lumber-room in the attics, and by-and-by he appeared radiant with satisfaction, bearing three gilt-framed engravings. One, a pretty scullery-maid, with her petticoats tucked up, sweeping the kitchen floor, was hung over the door. Another, representing the woman of Samaria at the well, took the place of a stout, elderly gentleman with a very red face, set in a deep frame of dull gold. The third was a picture of a young girl gathering flowers, and this was speedily made pendent over the wash-stand, the same nail having previously borne the weight of a ponderous and booted huntsman, with red coat, and a thick chain, and elephantine seal dangling from a very tight fob. Then a mirror was placed above the chimney-piece, and upon the ledge below, some light china ornaments. Lastly, a lady's toilet-table, with all its feminine paraphernalia was set in the alcove.

"I think I had better go with you to the Unicorn, Kitty."

"There's no need, sir."

"It will prevent any mistakes. You might not recognize her." Catharine smiled. It was quite evident her master thought he would.

In the end it was agreed that he should accompany her, and his satisfaction was apparent.

They were at the inn at least forty minutes before the coach was to be expected, and then it was curious to watch the old gentleman's fear lest it should have come in without their knowledge. It took a full five minutes to assure him that it was a most unusual circumstance for the mail to reach its destination nearly three quarters of an hour before it was due. After this he was violently excited over a travelling showman's van, which, being loaded high and covered with a tarpaulin, he discovered beyond doubt to be the carriage in which Minnie Milton was seated. Then a runaway horse filled him with harassment, for he had quite made up his mind that it had broken loose from the coach, and that there had been an accident somewhere down the road. Of this he was so confident that no other personage than the head stableman, Mr. Smiles, could disabuse him of his anxiety, or restore to his face anything like its wonted and genial calm.

At last the horn was heard, and round the corner appeared the steaming horses.

"Kitty."

"Yes, sir, it's here now."

"Hadn't you better stand in the road on the other side, and then there'll be no mistake? She's about seven years old, and I dare say she'll have something peculiar in her dress, coming from India, you know. I fancy, too, their faces are brown—very brown indeed.

It's so hot in that country. Quick, run to the gate."

"If you think well, sir, but—— "

"There's no time to lose. Don't let a single child get out without stopping her. Perhaps you'd better ask them all their names. Yes, that'll be the best plan."

The housekeeper thought her master had gone crazy, he was so excited. Decidedly she had better humour him, she thought; so she rushed into the middle of the road, and planted herself in a deep cart-rut.

The coach drew up, and Mr. Grewby, after vainly trying to take in the whole of the passengers at a single glance, rushed from the door to the ladder, peering and jostling against the people who were issuing forth or descending. There were not many. Several elderly gentlemen on their way home from 'Change, several young men returning from a cricket match, a woman with a basket of vegetables, one or two labourers with their pipes upside down, a nurse and a little boy about three years old—these comprised the full list of the passengers, so far as Mr. Grewby could see. He was grievously disappointed. He could see nothing of the child. He rushed up to the guard.

"Have you seen her? Has she passed? She's

a little girl, very brown face, and a most peculiar frock on."

"There's bin no young lady o' that description as I've seen, sir," said the guard.

"She's lost, Kitty."

"We'll soon find her again. Things, 'specially children, is never lost nowadays. You're sure the letter said as this was the coach?"

"Positive." Mr. Grewby fingered nervously about in all his pockets for the letter, but it was not to be found. "I know this is it. I took particular notice; read the note half a dozen times, at least."

"It's strange, certainly," said Catharine, who was herself somewhat alarmed for the little traveller.

Just at this moment a cry was heard. It seemed to emanate from the luggage that was piled up behind the coachman's seat. Two stablemen were already at work unstrapping.

"There's a child here, sir," said one.

"Good heavens, and she's crushed to death!" ejaculated Mr. Grewby, preparing to ascend the ladder.

"Oh no, she's right enough—only scared-looking. I'll lift her out." The lad handed down a little girl wrapped in mufflers from head to toe.

"Is your name Minnie, my dear?" inquired the gentleman earnestly. His lip was quivering with agitation.

The child sobbed convulsively.

"Don't be frightened; you're among friends, even if you should not be my little ward."

"Poor child!" said Catharine. "Tell me, lovey, if you're from India, and if your name's Milton."

"Yes," gasped the child. "You'll—you'll not leave me on the coach all night?"

"Bless me, no!" broke in Mr. Grewby. "Why didn't you get out, my dear?"

"I was given in charge of the driver, and he said I was not to stir on any account," said Minnie; "and I thought no one was coming." She spoke with a peculiar accent, which in itself had something attractive in it, and took Mr. Grewby's hand with a confidence which was all that was wanting to fill the old man's heart to overflowing.

"She's got Jack Milton's ways," he said, quiveringly.

"The driver went away," said the child, her little bosom heaving with each word. "You're papa's friend, aren't you?" She still looked frightened.

"Ay, and yours too. Bless your heart, child! he and I and Geordie have spent months and years together."

"Oh, I'm so glad! You'll not beat me, then?"

"Beat you, darling! What on earth made you think I should beat you for?"

"I'll do everything you tell me, if you won't use the cocoa-nut stick."

"Cocoa-nut stick! What's the child talking about?"

"Mrs. Mackenzie said you had a long, thick stick, with a knob at the end as big as a cocoa-nut, and that you had a servant who carried it behind you wherever you went, and that you beat little children with it, if they didn't do everything you bade them to do. I dreamt about it every night when we were on the ship; and sometimes when the sails gave a flap I thought you were at the cabin door, and tried to hide myself under the clothes."

"She wants a cocoa-nut stick herself!" cried Catharine, with great indignation.

"To think that such beings exist!" ejaculated the old man, pressing Minnie in his arms.

"I was thinking about it when you came, wondering which was the worst—to stay all night by myself on the coach, or to be beaten at your house."

"Which do you think the more terrible?"

"Stopping all night on the coach," said the child, shiveringly.

The old man again caught her to him. She was a pale-faced, tender-lipped child, with large lustrous eyes, and dark and dense hair. She seemed older than her years; but that might be from the

intense thoughtfulness of her face and the fact that she had travelled so far. She was tall for her age, too, and thin—"a slip of a child," as Catherine would have said; and weariness and tears had made sad havoc with features that belonged to one of Nature's highest orders of beauty. Even now her eyes, swollen as they were, and her trembling mouth, redeemed her beyond the reach of mediocrity. Indeed, if the soul of beauty be nothing more than the beauty of the soul outwardly expressed, it is just possible that Minnie Milton had reached her most perfect type, for the thoughtfulness of subdued mental suffering ruled every line of her face.

She looked up at her guardian with that same glance of confidence which had won his heart but a moment ago. He put his arm round her tenderly, her head fell back upon his breast, and, ere he could ask her another question, she was fast bound in sleep.

"Poor thing, poor thing!" murmured he.

When Minnie Milton woke she was in the hall of Grewby House. Many strange eyes were upon her, and she seemed overwhelmed with the splendour and air of luxury that surrounded her.

"I suppose you are very hungry?" said Mr. Grewby.

"I'm very tired," answered Minnie.

"But are you not hungry, too?"

"I'm not sure. I had a bun about eight o'clock this morning."

"Why, she's too clemmed to eat," cried Catherine. "The best plan is to put her to bed at once, and then bring her up summat hot. I'll see to it all, and at once," she said, in reply to her master's glance of entreaty.

Mr. Grewby went back into the dining-room, and sat down in an armchair. Though touched deeply—even more deeply than had appeared outwardly—with the sufferings of the little child, he was not unhappy in his meditations. His one thought was this. After all, it was not too late for him to redeem, to some extent, his unspent, rather than misspent, life. He had been selfish. All virtue in him he had allowed to dwell passive. He had not merely isolated himself from his fellows, but from their sufferings. He had permitted the best of his days to pass away without a red letter to mark some personal work of mercy. He had given his money, but he had refused his heart. His steward or his clergyman had told him of the widow and the fatherless, and he had said, "How much?" and that was all. And now, in his old age, his reward had been to find how little this same money could do for himself which he had deemed enough for others. He lacked exactly what the objects of his charity had lacked—sympathy.

He was alone. He had lived alone; he would have to die alone. The truth, when it forced itself upon him, came with a suddenness that in itself was terrible. He was transfixed with horror. No wonder that he thought he saw the hand of God in that dispensation which brought him the little child of his old comrade from a far-off land, and in a state of absolute want. No wonder he fancied he had petitioned for this, though his lips had framed no words. He would take the pale and tender shoot and plant it in his own soil, and foster it, and perchance he might yet live long enough to see some fruit for his services. If fruit came, it would be a sign that God had forgiven him.

He was roused from his reverie by a knock at the door, and the entrance of Catharine.

"It'll be hard to rear her, I fear me, sir. She's frail and white as a lily."

"The weather is warm, Kitty." He looked instantly anxious, while attempting to answer her fears.

"Ay; but we don't get August heat all the twelvemonth. She'll want careful tending, if she's to thrive."

"I'll send for the doctor in the morning," he said, decidedly; "unless you think he should come to-night. Send Hooper to me."

"Oh, she's well enough for to-night, and to-

morrow, for the matter o' that. My impression is as she's been starved."

"We can cure that complaint, at any rate," he replied, more cheerily.

"And about a governess, sir? We're too old to be companion-like for her."

The old man winced at this.

The housekeeper saw it. "She'll be none the less fond o' us, for that. She'll be glad to turn to us when she's tired o' sunshine. There's none so fond o' old folk as young folk when th' time for showing it offers itself."

"Have you thought of any one?"

"Only Miss Marnott."

"Miss Marnott?" muttered the old man, as if he were trying to recall a familiar but lost name.

"She as is niece to Mr. Haddock."

"Ah, yes."

"I should ha' mentioned it this morning, but for knowing as you'd connect it wi' past events."

"And yet why should I? I've never seen Miss Marnott. Her mother attended Geordie's sister, that's all. A mere accident."

"You gave the church years arterward to her son i' token of Miss Haddock's attentiveness."

"I will ask her daughter to be Minnie's companion for the same reason," said Mr. Grewby, firmly.

"Will you call or write?"

"I think I'll call. I've not been at the parsonage for six years or more."

"If you call about five o'clock in the afternoon, you will, mayhap, find Miss Marnott in."

"I will do so. You still go to Mr. Haddock's church, then?"

"Yes. I like his preaching; and I'm kind o' fond o' him personally."

"Quite natural. Good-night, Kitty."

"Good-night, sir."

Mr. Grewby went softly into Minnie's bedroom. She was fast asleep, with one hand under her head and the other lying placid and white upon the counterpane.

"It's her mouth that reminds me so much of Jack. He was a tender-hearted fellow, was Jack, and fond of Geordie. She shall never know want again, please God."

Then he went to his own room, and to bed.

CHAPTER XIV.

"Yet still, though we bend with a feign'd resignation,
Life beams not for us with one ray that can cheer;
Love and hope upon earth bring no more consolation—
In the grave is our hope, for in life is our fear."

BYRON.

MRS. BLAND did not cease to exert her power of torment over her children's governess. Maria in no degree continued to be less her mother's ally. The pupils saw their conduct was silently encouraged; they went on in insolent rebellion, and Cécile's life was miserable.

It was none the less miserable when she reflected that there was no issue to her suffering. If she looked forward, the horizon of her life was overgloomed with clouds. Not a single ray of comforting light broke through to cheer her with but a hope of future peace. Escape seemed wholly shut out. To relate her troubles at the parsonage was to be recalled by her loving relatives, indeed, from her unhappy position at the villa, but such a remission of evil

would be purchased at a cost of their home comforts, such as they were, which she dare not—nay, she would not—contemplate for one single moment. Come what might, her uncle and aunt should never be partakers of her sufferings.

This was her very little morsel of happiness just now. To a certain extent her troubles were being incurred for the sake of them she loved; and the sweet thought of self-sacrifice was, after all, a very sweet thought indeed. She got into a habit of mental calculation. She scored off every insult by a reference to her aunt's domestic needs. Each hard word was valued at so much, and her guardians at home received the benefit.

Poor child! She had other troubles, too, that were as little imagined by the parson and his wife. She had only conversed once with Geoffrey on the subject which had engrossed so much of their home-journey on the evening of the picnic. That little conversation had amounted to this, that they were to continue friends as heretofore, and that no further reference to Geoffrey's love was ever to be made again. So far all was well. But there had been a far deeper wound made in Cécile's heart as an outcome of this avowal of Geoffrey's attachment. Little had he thought what a dagger he had carried in his hand, and how far into her bosom he had buried it. Little, too, till

then had she herself been aware how she had exposed her breast to the blow. She knew from that day, if not before, that John Lexley was all in all to her; that her love was his, and that that love was unrequited.

It would be vain to say that this unwelcome discovery, with its sense of shameful reproach, had not occupied her nightly reflections. It was never absent. She had done what no true woman could do without a feeling of burning shame—given her love where it was not wanted. In heart she had gone halfway to invite Johnnie Lexley's love, and he had spurned it. Only in heart; she had never by word nor deed done more. That he, no more than the world around, knew this much, she felt confident; but it did not ease her affliction. She was her own judge in this, and she branded herself as a criminal; and no convict ever paid out his penalty as did she. Her mental suffering was something so intense that other pain had been at times powerless. Often had Mrs. Bland's harshest reproaches fallen without a meaning upon her ear. Frequently had Maria's keenest darts caused neither blood to flow, nor skin to be rased. Her frame had been turned to stone under the benumbing influence of a voice within; and the sharpest shafts from outer tongues had fallen like pebbles against a wall.

But there was something almost worse than this.

I wonder if every reader will sympathize with her in deeming it worse? There was an admixture of indignation and disappointment in regard to Johnnie himself. Somehow, she was resolute on one point. He had treated her ill. He had never whispered a single syllable of love to her—nay, he had never insinuated softly by word of mouth that she was anything more to him than a commonplace acquaintance; and yet she was sure that he had treated her ill. He had come less than Geoffrey, or even Ben, to the villa, ostensibly to call upon Mrs. Bland; and he had never waylaid her upon her daily journeys home. He had made so few visits to the parsonage that he was all but actually unknown to her aunt. He had never seemed to have gone six yards out of his way to come across her; and yet she was sure that he had treated her ill. There was a big remonstrance in her soul at his conduct. All these things would by the world be urged in behalf of his indifference; and yet within the secret depths of her bosom they were all just so many of her charges against him that he had entrapped her love. Knowing his nature as she thought she did—his retiring disposition, his diffidence, and his mistrust of self—all these were but negative acts in demonstration of his fervent attachment. To her he had made far bolder attempts to reach her heart than Geoffrey, who had always rushed instantly to

her side. To her Johnnie had pressed his suit with keener ardour, and more daring assurance than his brother.

And yet Geoffrey came pleading his cause; and his first word was this—that Johnnie had sent a message hoping she would listen to his burning words, and be his wife.

But she was not so isolated in this great grief as not to be unnoticed. Her aunt began to see both in her face daily more pinched, and body growing weak and thin, that something was seriously wrong.

"Is there some secret trouble, darling?" she had said one night.

It was a pointed and sudden question. For a moment Cécile was silent, and that silence, momentary as it was, convicted her; for Mrs. Haddock was not merely a woman, but possessed of womanly instincts in a high degree.

"Nothing particular, auntie."

"Tell me what it is. Perhaps I can help you, although you do not think so."

"No one can help me."

"That must be a sore burden which none can carry but one."

Poor Cécile! What was she to do? She would have died rather than explain the true cause of

her sorrow. "I am harassed just now with my pupils. They do not get on as I should like them to do."

"And Mrs. Bland is unkind to you in consequence?"

"Sometimes," replied Cécile, slowly.

"I thought so. I told your uncle some days ago; but he has such a high opinion of the Blands that he would not entertain the idea."

"You must not tell him, auntie."

"Why not, love?"

"He would remove me; and then what should we do for the money?"

"Money obtained at the cost of my child's happiness can add none to mine. We shall manage some way. God will provide."

"Oh, auntie, do not tell uncle. I could not bear to live here without being a help to you."

"Darling, have I not often told you that we could not do without you? Apart from those thousand little acts which a servant cannot perform, you save me a servant in works of absolute drudgery."

"But I do so like to think that I am directly adding to the income. It is quite a different feeling, I assure you," she said smiling, amid her tears.

"You mercenary creature!"

"It's true, auntie. Besides, while I am a daily governess, I can work both indoors and out of doors, and thus save money as well as add money."

"You shall go somewhere else, love. The Skillicornes——"

"They filled up the place last week. A Miss Crompton, from Manchester, is going."

"I will think over the matter, then."

I fear that the reader will be quite wearied with Cécile's troubles, when I hint that this conversation disclosed another cause of sorrow. I do not suppose she was what would be considered a clever governess. I am not sure that she had quite sufficient decision for this. But she knew much, and she had the scarce gift of being able to impart what she knew. And it was with real dismay that she faced the fact that so far during the present half-year her two pupils had made but the most inconsiderable progress with their work. Moral discipline over them she had none. That was impossible, when she herself was attacked before them of her employer. Punishment was equally out of the question. The boy, at least, could laugh at the threat, for he had nothing to do but run away from it. His mother would be his support.

As Cécile returned to the villa the next day, she was joined by Geoffrey, and he walked by her side as far as the gate of the Blands' house. He had been telling her how strangely people were behaving to Johnnie; and in spite of all determinations to the

contrary, she had become deeply interested in his relation. Nay, her heart had instantly gone forth in behalf of Johnnie.

"What can it mean?"

"I think I have a clue to it, though I have not mentioned it to Johnnie as yet. There has been a good deal of gossip about Ben's going to Uncle Emlott's mill, and many people imagine that we have ousted him from the concern."

"You did not do so, did you?"

"No. It was uncle's offer. And indeed Ben's prospects are far better than if he had stayed with us; only people choose to look upon his being taken in as uncle's partner as a benevolent action on his part after he had discovered that we were trying to get rid of Ben."

"But why do they look upon your brother as the sole doer of this supposed mean action?"

"Because he is the eldest; and, as such, the prime mover in the affair."

"They cannot think that he has acted, as they deem he has acted, for self-interest?" asked Cécile with flashing eyes.

"I fear that is their fancy," said Geoffrey, wrathfully.

"It would have been so much more natural to suppose it was done for your sake, you know."

"Of course; and therefore they won't suppose anything of the kind."

"How cruel the world is! But here I am. Good afternoon." And Cécile passed through the small front garden, and climbed a flight of steps to the door of the villa, little aware that she had been seen conversing with Geoffrey Lexley, and that a red rag to a maddened bull was as nothing compared to the wrath with which Mrs. Bland was filled when her attention was drawn to the fact by Maria.

"Goodness gracious, mamma, there's Miss Marnott talking with Geoffrey Lexley!"

"Where?"

"At the gate."

"The impudent thing! Is he coming in?"

"No. I believe he was about to do so, but she said something, and he turned away. I dare say he was on his way here."

"The audacious girl! She is more shameless than I had imagined. I will write to Mr. Emlott about it this very afternoon, and send the note by the servant. Perhaps he may drop in after tea," she added, with the faintest attempt at a simper. "I cannot let that young man be thus entrapped without a struggle to save him."

"Perhaps it's too late," said Maria, looking down.

"It shall not be too late," replied Mrs. Bland, in

a fresh burst of fury. "I will teach that bold-faced thing not to thwart me. She a governess, and I her mistress, and she must try to overreach me, forsooth!"

Meantime, Cécile advanced into the room, all unconscious of the storm she had aroused.

"May I be permitted to ask, Miss Marnott, who was the young gentleman who accompanied you to my gate?"

"Certainly," rejoined Cécile. Her blood was up. Geoffrey had told her that Mrs. Bland, chief of others, had begun to treat his brother with an ill-concealed disdain. She remembered that it was so the evening he and his brother were at the villa. She had wondered at it at the time.

"That is no answer," rejoined Mrs. Bland, after a moment's pause.

"I cannot promise a clearer reply. You asked if you might be permitted to inquire who the young gentleman was who accompanied me to the gate."

"Yes."

"And I said, 'Certainly.'"

"Yes."

"So far you have only sought permission to ask a question." Cécile uttered every word with cold distinctness. It astonished as much as it infuriated Mrs. Bland.

"May I ask if it is usual for a menial to take up her mistress's words?"

"Certainly." Cécile was calm enough even to smile at Mrs. Bland's stupidity in putting her question in a manner so open to her, Cecile's, advantage.

"Do you refuse to answer, miss?" burst out the enraged woman.

"I have answered every question you have put to me so far."

"It was Geoffrey Lexley."

"Of course it was."

"Of course it was! I see the meaning of this insolence. You are engaged to Mr. Geoffrey Lexley? But it won't do!"

"How will it not do, if such were the case, Mrs. Bland?"

"It won't do," repeated the lady of the house, with an angry sneer. "Do you suppose that he will be allowed to marry you—a low, under-bred governess? No, Miss Marnott, I've watched you from the first; and the secret you thought was yours, and yours to make the most out of, is no longer in your hands. I am quite as well aware as yourself that John Lexley is not the heir to the Grange, and that Geoffrey is. There!"

"What can you mean?" gasped Cécile.

"No acting, if you please, Miss Marnott," said Mrs.

Bland, swelling herself out with dignity. "Sufficient that your manœuvring has been detected; enough that your scheme has failed. I shall inform Mr. Emlott this very afternoon of what has transpired, if I have not your word that this foolish engagement shall be instantly at an end."

"You are speaking in riddles to me, Mrs. Bland; but one thing I see distinctly. You are endeavouring, by such means as your disposition suggests, to get me to make certain statements relative to Mr. Geoffrey and myself. I shall do nothing of the kind. Whatever may take place without your house must come under the cognizance of my aunt and uncle. To them alone am I responsible. I must therefore ask you to excuse my leaving the room. I came to you as your children's governess."

"And you leave it this day as dismissed from that office."

"Am I to understand that I am not to go into the schoolroom?"

"You are to understand that I will not have those belonging to me associated either as pupils or companions with one who has plotted in this shameless manner. You have schemed after the affections of a young man who is ignorant, though you are not, that he is heir to a large estate and a high social position. This scheme you imagine

has met with success. You shall yet find that it shall end in failure. Meantime, you are dismissed from your office. I fear contamination for my innocent children." Mrs. Bland waved her hand toward the door, and Cécille vanished.

Cécile had faced the lion in his lair for once, and she had not had wholly the worst of it. Still, as she walked homewards, she knew that the thing she had dreaded, and which she had but this morning implored her aunt not to bring about, had already come. She was no longer governess; therefore, she had no longer an income. How she had enjoyed placing the whole of her pittance, miserably small as it was, in the hands of her dear guardian! How her own eyes had glistened at the satisfaction that shone in her aunt's! That look had upborne her amid numberless trials; it had supported her against all the unkind reflections and open hostilities of the Bland family.

Buried in these reflections, she had taken a circuitous route homewards. There was a wood on her left hand, and through this wood ran a path, the path itself leading to the weir, above which was the stream-lake now so painfully familiarized to Cécile's memory. She had never visited the upper end where the accident had happened since that eventful afternoon. An impulse came upon her to

do so now. She had not turned hitherwards of purpose. Being here, she might as well go the little distance further, and take one, just one, view of the spot.

How beautiful everything seemed in the early autumn! And yet there was that almost imperceptible first change which tells of decay—here and there a deeper russet on the foliage of the trees that drooped over the rocks; here and there a fallen leaf, to tell what the rest must shortly come to. The afternoon itself was very still, and under the sombre shade of the narrowed valley, and beneath the still darker cover of a huge boulder, Cécile examined the fall, above which Johnnie had stood when he saw the advancing avalanche of waters. How equal to the sudden emergency he had been! His mind had been made up on the instant, and his thoughts must have flown to her as quickly; for had he not thrown himself, as it seemed, down that terrible precipice, with no other object but to save her? and he had done so to his own serious hurt.

Until Geoffrey had spoken to her, and had brought credentials from his brother to further his suit, she had clung to that one remembrance with a strange tenacity—that sweet thought that Johnnie Lexley instantly turned to her in the face of that imminent peril. His heart had gone forth to save

her, ere even the brain could fashion the plan. But all this had been crushed out by that revelation of the younger brother's. Johnnie had no affection for her, and he had endeavoured to make her Geoffrey's wife!

Had Johnnie discovered her love, and read her heart? A crimson flush overspread her cheeks as this thought suddenly came upon her. Perhaps, with that quiet intuition which she knew he possessed—for had she not studied him as no other had or could study him?—he had learnt her secret, and then sent this very message by his brother to let her know that she must not reject Geoffrey under the supposition that she could gain the affections of him, to whom she had already, unasked and unsought, given her love. As these terrible thoughts suggested themselves to her alarmed senses, she buried her hot face in her hands and gave vent to a single prolonged sob.

And then came into her heart that same indignation which she had felt before. She stood up, the look of shame turned into one of anger. Let the world form what judgment it might on such topics, one thing she was assured of—she had not given her love unsought, or even unasked. If love must not go forth to meet love till words of love are spoken, then indeed she was guilty; for Johnnie had never hinted, or conveyed even by words of

double meaning, that he loved her. But as she stood there she scorned Johnnie for the imagined defence. Love has the smallest dialect of the languages of the world. It depends, like the converse of mutes, on faint inflections of the face, on glances imperceptible to the world at large, on signs invisible to all but one; and if it will talk, it conveys its meaning rather by what it abstains from saying, than by what it says. This, at least, was Cécile's idea of love till the one word that pledged two hearts together was uttered. Her heart was sore, and at this moment she hated the man she loved; hated him with that intensity which we can never feel but for those we have loved, when that love has been outraged.

In this frame of mind she left the vale, got on the high-road once more, and was passing the old church, when she met Isaac Curling and Johnnie himself.

"Good afternoon, Miss Marnott."

John Lexley stopped, and would have spoken; but with the coldest of bows she said "Good afternoon," and passed on.

Johnnie stared at her in blank amazement, then a flush came over his face.

"I told you how it was, Isaac. They're all alike. What can it mean?"

"She's only in a hurry, Mr. John. You're getting fanciful; that's what it is."

"But everybody cannot be always in a hurry. I get a bow, or a stare, or a cold shake of the hand, and then every one passes on. There are some who talk to me—old Mr. Juggins, for instance; but he speaks in a tone of sympathy, as if something very terrible had happened to me. I could scarcely help laughing last night when I met him on my way from the mill. I teased him about being low-spirited, and that made him more depressed; and yet all the time I could not help feeling that it was I who was the cause of his melancholy."

"Maybe it's all fancy, Mister John," said Isaac, looking very troubled.

"Perhaps I'm making things worse than they are," rejoined Johnnie; "but there are people whose manner cannot be misinterpreted—Mrs. Bland, for instance."

"Who's Mrs. Bland?" asked Isaac, with a touch of contempt.

"I can survive her slights, certainly," said Johnnie. "There's Mr. —— But I need not run through the list. You saw how Miss Marnott treated me just now."

"Mrs. Bland has put her up to it, depend on't."

Johnnie shook his head. He knew Cécile better than that. No; it was the cut direct he had received —open and personal. "I shall know what it all means shortly, no doubt."

"Mister John," said Isaac, in a disturbed voice, taking at the same time young Lexley's hand in his own two, "I wish you would let me advise you a bit. Don't you say nowt about it to any one. Whatever it is—whether it's fancy or real—it'll blow over. I never seed a trouble o' any kind yet as didn't 'ventually blow over. Just keep quiet, and all will come right."

If Johnnie had not been thinking about Cécile, he must have noticed the anxiety in Isaac's voice and manner.

"I dare say you are right, Isaac," he said, musingly.

After her rencounter with John Lexley Cécile Marnott walked very fast, for mental excitement was upon her. She quickly reached home, and was somewhat surprised to hear a strange voice in the dining-room as she entered. She thought she would wait in the breakfast-room till the visitor was gone; but as she was crossing the lobby, the door of the drawing-room opened, and out came her aunt and a gentleman whose face she thought she had seen before, but his name she did not know.

"Is this your niece?" said the visitor, with a gentle and genial smile.

"Yes. Cécile, this is Mr. Grewby, of the Park."

Cécile had heard of the Grewbys, of course, and

much she wondered what had brought him to the parsonage. The gentleman in question held out his hand, and retaining hers in his own, said in a kindly voice—"I hope, my dear young lady, that the request which your aunt will seek from you in my behalf will meet with your kindly consideration. Mrs. Haddock says you are clever, tender-hearted, and good. I care little about the first, but the last two qualities I prize much. What do you say yourself? Are you tender-hearted, and are you good?" He asked this with a sweet smile.

"I think I am tender-hearted; but I have been in a passion all day."

"Poor child, poor child!" said the old man kindly. He might have been trying to show what he meant by tender-hearted, his voice was so gently commiserative.

"I don't believe it," rejoined Mrs. Haddock, laughingly. "Hasn't he a sweet face?" she added, as her visitor went out at the gate.

"He has beautiful grey eyes," said Cécile. "Oh, aunt, I have such news for you!" she went on seriously.

"Oh, Cécile, I have such news for you!" said her aunt, mimicking the other's solemnity of tone.

"But I have really. I am afraid you will think it bad news. Mrs. Bland has dismissed me."

"Has she? Well, she has only saved you the trouble of resigning. You can now go at once to the Park as governess to Mr. Grewby's little ward, and your salary is to be fifty pounds a year."

"Fifty pounds!—and Grewby Park!" cried Cécile, in a bewildered tone.

"Yes; and you are to spend your Sundays at home—coming on Saturday at noon, and returning at nine o'clock on Monday. Everything is arranged."

"But can you spare me, aunty dear?"

"Spare you! Why, I was scheming how to get rid of you when Mr. Grewby came."

"Oh, aunt," cried Cécile, laughing and crying by turns, "I am sure he will be kind to me!"

"Mr. Grewby? He is the gentlest man under the sun."

Then Mr. Haddock came in, and Cécile had to tell her tale, and then Mrs. Haddock hers; and from the stories related two deductions were drawn, to which all readily assented. Mr. Grewby was the dearest old man in the world; Mrs. Bland was the most odious woman in existence. Even the parson assented to the last as to the first conclusion.

About Johnnie Lexley Cécile said nothing.

CHAPTER XV.

"Well, if Fortune be a woman, she's a good wench for this gear."
The Merchant of Venice.

MR. EMLOTT dressed himself with unwonted care. He had received a short note from Mrs. Bland. It ran as follows:

"Westbourne Villa, Thursday, 4 o'clock.

"MY DEAR MR. EMLOTT,

"I have news to impart to you in confidence which I fear will cause you deep anxiety. Knowing how desirous you are for the well-being of your nephews, I feel it a solemn duty not to hide from your knowledge certain circumstances which have revealed themselves to my own observation. I am afraid the machinations of Miss Marnott have met with but too great success. Still, it may not be too late. I trust not, for the family's sake, for each member of which I entertain the warmest interest. I write particularly to yourself because of the conversation previously held between us, and I may be

permitted to add, because I have always learnt to look upon you as one of the Lexley circle.

"My daughter unites with me in kindest regards to yourself and Mr. Ben.

"Believe me, your most sincere friend,

"EMILY BLAND.

"P.S.—We shall take tea about 7. If it should be agreeable to you to join us, I can enter more into detail about this last disclosure. It will add to our pleasure if Mr. Ben should accompany you."

On this hint Mr. Emlott acted. He had but an hour left to make his preparations; but before the time for setting out had arrived he was clad in his best attire, full evening costume—gilt buttons upon a buff waistcoat, with white flowers embroidered thereupon. His mind was made up. He would propose to Mrs. Bland. Ben, too, was summoned hastily from the mill. He must be there, if it were only to occupy Maria's attention during that delicate crisis which most men prefer to pass through alone.

"Does this tie sit easily, Tomkins?"

"Most comfortable, sir," responded the lackey, preserving the illustration. The tie evidently sat more comfortably than its owner. He fidgeted in his chair. He was drinking a glass of port to brace his nerves.

"Not a bad sort of waistcoat, I should say—eh?"

"That waistcoat would do anything for a man, sir."

"You really think so?" Mr. Emlott looked encouraged.

"Wonderful. Reminds me of Sir Reginald Fitz-George Sackville St. Omers's waistcoat, last place but four I was at. Wore it when he proposed to the Dowager Duchess of Dashwood. Fine-looking man Sir Reginald."

"Did she accept him?" asked the gratified deacon, eagerly.

"Before he asked her. He always said it was the waistcoat as did it for him, or did for him, I forget which way he put it; came to the same thing in the end."

"Dear me! And he proposed in that waistcoat, did he?" inquired the interested manufacturer.

"The identical same, sir—that is, so far as the pattern goes; recognized it as soon as I opened your parcel, sir. They had a miserable time of it; regular cat-and-dog life. I couldn't stand it, and went to the Earl of Digborough's."

"You're sure it is the same pattern?"

"No doubt about it; knowed them flowers at once. Sir Reginald gave me the waistcoat afterwards. Always done in first-class society. Says he to me,

'Tomkins, if it had been a strait-waistcoat it would have been better for me.'"

"Tell Mr. Ben I'm waiting." The deacon looked pale.

"Yes, sir." Tomkins disappeared.

Ben came down a moment afterwards, and the two seated themselves in the carriage.

"Ben, I've bin thinking for some time o' changing my creed."

"Changing your creed, uncle?" said the astonished nephew.

"Why shouldn't I, if I have convictions?" asked his uncle tartly. "They've bin growing steadily of late."

"I'm sure you'll do what's right. But what'll the chapel say?"

"Of course it'll be a blow to them," rejoined the deacon complacently; "but they'll get over it—in time, that is."

"I don't know," said Ben, who knew when it was safe to contradict his relative.

"Well, they must bear it somehow, for I'm going over to the Church. What'll you do yourself?"

"I'll not interfere wi' business, I suppose."

The manufacturer laughed. "You're not a bad sort, Ben, arter all. I don't think you'll be the ruin of my concern, as'll be yours some day. No, you may ha' convictions, too, wi' all safety."

"I'll go wi' you, uncle."

"That's all reet, then. Maria's 'Church,' you know."

"So she is," said Ben, as if it was a discovery.

"You must make your running while you've a chance, lad. They're keen on Geoffrey, now they know his position. You've not let out on that subject?"

"Never said a word to any one. But they all knows."

"Ay; that kind o' thing soon gets out. But I don't want it to be raked back to our door—not just yet."

"Geoffrey's a lucky chap," put in Ben, with a covetous glance towards the Grange property, which lay to the left.

"He is so." This was the only drawback to the manufacturer's triumph. In these present days, he was not sure that he did not hate the nephew who claimed actual kin, more than he who did not. It seemed as if Geoffrey was the greater hindrance to the furtherance of his various plans. Besides, Geoffrey treated him with a bold superciliousness which rankled deeply in his heart.

Parkinson drew up at the villa, and further conversation ceased.

"So glad to see Mr. Ben with you."

"He were keen to come, I can assure you," responded the mill-owner. "I'd better give him a lift at th' start," he thought. Then he added aloud, "He's not much o' a society man, but he's allus at home here, somehow. Arn't you, Ben?"

"I'm never so happy as when I'm here," responded his nephew dutifully. He wasn't particularly fond of Maria, but his uncle had vouched for the money that lay in that quarter.

"It makes me more than happy to hear it. Such congeniality is so rare. Indeed, it makes me feel as if we were entertaining relatives rather than friends—a little family reunion, as it were."

"La, mamma," said Maria, simpering.

"It does really, my love."

"I'm proud to hear it. Aren't you, Ben?"

"It's overwhelming, quite," said Ben.

"It seems to promise so much for our future union—that is, unitedness, if I may use sich a word," said the deacon, looking at his hostess. She blushed. How it was brought about I am unable to tell the reader. There could have been no sudden application of rouge by the aid of her handkerchief, for it was in her pocket. I state the simple facts without explanation. It is beyond me.

The tea passed over comfortably. Mrs. Bland, as already stated some chapters ago, had a healthy

appetite, and it had not fallen off during the interval. Nothing had made a more favourable impression on Mr. Emlott than this. He need not lay any restraint upon himself—and he didn't. On the contrary, he attacked the crumpets and muffins with an ardour which, if symbolic of his coming assault on the lady's affections must have augured well for his success.

When they adjourned to the drawing-room, they almost immediately fell into pairs. Maria was desirous of showing Ben some prints for which she affected a languishing admiration. Besides, she took the young man sufficiently into her confidence at the outside to whisper that her mother wished to consult his uncle on a matter of importance.

"It's about Miss Marnott, isn't it?" asked Ben.

"How clever of you! How did you know?" inquired Maria, gushingly.

"I saw your mother's letter."

"How stupid of me, of course." Then they settled down, and Maria did most of the talking. As for the other two, they were already *in medias res*.

"I knew it was Mr. Geoffrey. I should recognize him anywhere. So manly, not to say elegant. Indeed Miss Marnott admitted it as soon as she discovered that there was no escape. I need scarcely assure you how both Maria and I blushed for her,—so utterly unbecoming."

Mr. Emlott was not in an easy position. Personally he had not the slightest objection to Geoffrey marrying the governess. It would be considered a *mésalliance*, he thought, and so far a fall for his nephew. If it had been a barmaid, he would have furthered it even to the risk of offending Mrs. Bland. That a woman educated and a lady, and yet driven to earn a livelihood by teaching, is often superior from every point to another better placed and with money, was a view that had never entered into his mental sense. From a barmaid to a governess was a single step to him. Thus, although he would have preferred the former, he felt by no means desirous of throwing obstacles into the way of an alliance with the latter.

But Mr. Emlott also knew that Mrs. Bland's eye was upon Geoffrey for her own daughter. Once married, or even engaged himself to the mother, he would have no more apprehensions on that score. He would be invested with fresh powers, then—powers over the daughter, as well as the mother. Till that day arrived, however, he must be cautious. He must not allow his disinclination to throw obstacles in the way of a marriage betwixt Geoffrey and Miss Marnott to be observable. Silently he would further it to the best of his ability.

He expressed his disgust of the governess, and

governesses in general. He declared his belief that they were all schemers, and the more so because they had opportunities thrust upon them from their *quasi* position as members of the family. If he had his way they should be reduced to the level of the kitchen, which was their proper place. To all of which Mrs. Bland readily agreed.

"Do you know, Mr. Emlott, you are the first gentleman I have ever met who sympathized with me on this subject. It is quite sad to see how frequently this class of person is encouraged in unbecoming courses by thoughtless non-observance on the part of their employers."

"Dreadful!" added the manufacturer, in a tone of abhorrence.

Then, without any premonitory signal, he broke off into another topic. "I'm what the world calls a rich man, ma'am—that is, dear Mrs. Bland."

The widow's heart gave a flutter. "I suppose so, Mr. Emlott. Riches are but a small ingredient of human happiness." This, of course, was strictly the proper thing to say.

"I've a carrige, ma'am."

"A beautiful landau, Mr. Emlott—charming."

"And a footman equal to anything o' his kind in the whole of the metroperlis."

"So handsome; such soft, curly whiskers."

"And a house furnished regardless—quite regardless, I assure you, ma'am."

"Such taste displayed throughout. I can't believe but a lady chose the carpets for you." Just a shadow of a shade of reproach imparted into the tone of her voice.

"In fact, everything's first-class—tip-top, I may say, if it's a expression as may be allowed under the circumstances."

"So expressive," said the widow.

"I wants but one thing to finish it off."

"Dear me!" said Mrs. Bland, with a charming air of ignorance, "whatever can that be?"

"A partner as is beautiful, well-eddicated, knows what's what, can see as a dinner is proper-ly conducted—one as'll shine in society, and virtuous, o' course. I knows a female as is all that—nothing less."

"Ah, Mr. Emlott, virtue is everything."

"It's a important thing, there's no doubt. That trenches on the religious; and there I know lies the great difficulty. My convictions regarding Dissent is becoming firmer every——"

"So are mine," broke in the widow anxiously.

"There it is," rejoined the deacon. "I knowed as that 'ud be the difficulty."

"No, not a—not exactly a difficulty, Mr. Emlott. I've been—I don't feel quite satisfied with the doc-

trine taught at Mr. Haddock's church; it's not what it used to be."

"The parish church is better. More music; th' congregation more respectibull."

"The parish church is, of course——" Mrs. Bland couldn't go on. She didn't quite understand the deacon; she must feel her way a little.

"That difficulty shall not stand in the way. I've made my mind up o' that p'int. Juggins, he's——"

"Delightful preacher," put in Mrs. Bland.

"You're kind to say it, ma'am, but he's—you know what I mean—he's——"

"Quite so."

"Exactly. Therefore, on the whole, I think of leaving the Baptists and j'ining the——"

"Particular Baptists! How strange! What a remarkable coincidence, when I myself——"

"What do you say to the parish church?"

"The parish church!" The widow was equal to the occasion. She had not quite committed herself. "Ah, you know Mr. Bradford, then? Such a devoted man. Quiet and dignified; and as for his sermons—oh, Mr. Emlott, his English is perfect."

"Then it's settled?" The deacon took her hand.

The widow said nothing, but contrived to look as if it was. What it might be that had been settled —whether that Mr. Bradford's English was pure, or

that Mr. Emlott was to become an Episcopalian, or that Mrs. Bland had had a narrow escape of embracing the tenets of Particular-Baptism, or that the manufacturer and the widow were henceforth bound to one another under an engagement to marry—these are points that may somewhat harass the reader's mind. It is better to say at once, therefore, that the latter alone was the prime subject of the deacon's avowal and the widow's smiling acquiescence.

"Your uncle and my mamma seem very interested in that piece of business," said Maria, with a slight ogle.

"Don't they?"

"But I think mamma is seeking advice from Mr. Emlott. Do you know, Mr. Ben, she's not quite satisfied with Mr. Haddock."

"Dear me! He's a good preacher, is he not?"

"Yes, very fair. But it's not that. Mamma is getting somewhat doubtful about his views, and she says that he has been feeding her with husks for months."

"Has she only just found it out?"

"Only a few days ago. Quite sad, isn't it?"

"Has she tried the parish church?"

"Oh, Mr. Ben, how can you suggest such a thing? It was only this morning mamma said she would rather be burnt at the stake than sit under Mr. Brad-

ford's ministry. It's quite popish—something perfectly awful, I believe."

"Where will she go, then?" asked Ben simply.

"We can't say yet; but if you will keep it to yourself, I will tell you a secret."

Ben, of course, vowed fidelity.

"Zion."

Ben stared, and thought of his uncle. He looked at the pair. Evidently all difficulties were at an end. He wondered whether he was to go to the Baptist chapel or the parish church, in the future.

CHAPTER XVI.

"He that seeketh to be eminent amongst able men, hath a great task, but that is ever good for the public: but he that plots to be the only figure among cyphers, is the decay of a whole age."—BACON.

THE result of his visit to the villa was eminently satisfactory to Ebenezer Emlott. He had got him a wife—at least, he was on the high-road to that preferment. He had said nothing about the widow's money, though he had said much about his own; but it is doubtful whether that matter had ever been absent from his thoughts during the entire progress of his suit. He loved money as he loved his own soul. In other words, he loved it much more, for there is no man living who can cast an equal balance between the two. The equipoise is impossible.

If there had ever been good thoughts in the deacon's heart—and let us trust there had been; for we are not all bad—they had been stifled by his besetting weakness, the craving for greed. And as

the bad had made way into his soul, the good had shrunk from the contact. And where had it gone? Had it vanished whither it could never return again? It almost seemed so.

It is the dark aspect of greed that it must drag after it a tribe of other-unhappy qualities. It has so many boon companions, and it cannot consent to live without them. Through greed Ebenezer Emlott had become unscrupulous; through greed he had nursed hatreds and jealousies; through greed he had lost whatever of inner spiritual revelation he had ever received. His religion had become a mere conformity to the outward rites of a sect; and when, backed up by his money, he found he could walk in higher temporal paths, his religious belief, such as it was, became at once a temporal thing also, and was made, like his clothes, to fit his new circumstances. Having become wealthy, it was as imperative that he should attend the parish church as that he should be conveyed in his carriage there. To have his pew-door opened by his crimson-vested lackey, and to listen to the reading of the Liturgy, represented to him but one and the same principle.

He was not a miser. Very few men of his class are so. His struggle after wealth was not to hoard it, but to spend it; to realize by purchase its full

equivalent—a place in society, the bows of the inferior-placed, the condescensions of the great. In his mind mankind was divided into two classes—those who rode in carriages, and those who did not. This was the Rubicon; and when his landau arrived from London, and his crest, or rather a crest, stood out upon the panels, he had not a doubt but that he, Ebenezer Emlott, had crossed it, and that his foot was henceforth set on the higher level. None so insolent as he now to his inferiors; none so exacting in all demonstrations of respect from his dependants. Why should it not be so? Was not he drawn in a carriage? Had he not crossed the Rubicon?

To the chapel especially had the deacon aired his grandeur. Nowhere had it been more markedly resented. Zion could ill dispense with the presence and protection of Ebenezer Emlott, but it did not like the inflations of the one, or the condescensions of the other. Zion, too, lay near the greengrocery business. Zion in times past had scolded Ebenezer's father for short weight, and cuffed Ebenezer's self on the ear for sticking to it that it wasn't. Zion had complained of the parental butter that it was cheesy, and the filial hands that they were grimy. There had been days, too, when some of the elderly worshippers at Zion had prophesied, with a shake

of the head, that that lad would come to no good; and, as even within the covert of Zion there was a prevalent feeling that money and wealth were not bad kinds of things in their way, the older folk felt upon the whole the lad had duped them, and were proportionately aggrieved. As for the manufacturer himself, he hated the chapel. Years past, it had been an honour to him to be elected to the deacon-ship. Then he had valued it. Now he was aiming at something higher, and it was nothing to him to spurn a friend who had ceased to be useful to him.

While on the subject of Zion, we may say that that place, though intended by its founders to cherish love, had in Ebenezer's heart bred hatred. It was in their relation to the chapel that the deacon had from the first disliked the Lexleys. Ralph Lexley had been his only rival there. Every year as it saw him, Ebenezer, rise higher in the world, saw him leaving one and another behind him, but Ralph Lexley still far in the forefront. The sensation caused by the alliance of the Grange family with the chapel had never finally subsided—the effect had never worn off. It was the great event of Zion's history, and the family came in for their full share of the distinction. Mr. Lexley had not always, nay, he had seldom, claimed any leadership in the chapel's movements, aggressive or defensive. But every one

knew that he could always have it upon assertion, and no man was better aware of it than Ebenezer. Indeed, when by a domineering and dictatorial spirit, united with boldness and energy, he had obtained the empire of his fellows, he knew perfectly well that his rule was but permissive. Let his brother-in-law assert himself, and he must descend from his seat. These things he could not forgive.

This feeling was increased directly by his sister's marriage with Ralph Lexley himself. He had then, for the first time, discovered that he had it in him to rule his brother-in-law as he had ruled the chapel. It was not till then that Ralph Lexley's feeble and vacillating spirit had displayed itself to him. But when he would show to his fellow-deacons the impassive resistance offered to his own will by his relative he found he could not. It was seldom he joined their committees, but when he did so there was a dignity and courtesy which unvaryingly, although he himself was ignorant of it, preserved for him and his opinions the respectful regards of all the leading chapel people. Not even Ebenezer's openly-expressed contempt for his brother-in-law could weaken this influence. There were occasions, too, still more rare, when Ralph Lexley's slumbering soul would seem to have been suddenly wakened, and then his spirit would be irresistible, and his will, like a torrent, would sweep

committee, chairman, and Ebenezer Emlott before it. Everybody was filled with admiration at these seasons, except Ralph Lexley's brother-in-law.

It was a time of great triumph to the manufacturer when the scandal about Johnnie Lexley became first bruited abroad. Once out of safe hands, the story flew with flash-like rapidity throughout the community. Very soon details and facts were given with an accuracy of information which spoke as much for the ingenuity of those who related them as for their freedom from all the restraints of veracity. The first feeling was that of a great shock. "Isn't it awful?" "Isn't it shocking?" This was the prevailing cry. For a few days Mr. Lexley was a deliberate villain—a man who had been living for nearly a generation of years under a false and detestable guise. Nothing too bad could be said about him. People—those of the higher class—began to fight shy of him, coldly bowed in the street when they met, and passed on, or if they did not pass on at once, uttered one or two commonplaces in a constrained and awkward fashion. The irreligious looked at him with curiosity, the poor with pity, and good men like Mr. Juggins spoke to him in a tone of pitiful and tender reproach, which must have touched his sensitive and sympathetic nature to the very quick.

"He is down low enough now," said Ebenezer to himself; "but I'll ha' him lower than that afore I've done."

The fact was, nothing could satisfy Emlott's uncharitable hatred of his brother-in-law but his public expulsion from the chapel. He was determined that this should be done. Let this be done, and then he would himself dissolve the connection which bound him to Zion. It should be his latest act. If Mr. Juggins and the rest should prove themselves slow to back him up in the matter, he could use his purposed withdrawal from Zion as a threat. This, he did not doubt, would be quite enough. Ralph Lexley would be authoritatively denounced as a hardened transgressor, be deprived of his membership, and be openly expelled. Let this day arrive, and his dearest hope would be realized. He could not help laughing grimly as he thought of Zion's spleen when it discovered that he had left them, and that, in spite of his conditional threat, he had intended to leave them.

"Mr. Juggins, we must have a meeting. I shall see Scragg, and Bentham, and some of the others this afternoon—this very afternoon, sir."

"It is a mistake, I think," argued the old man, with a tear in his eye. He loved Ralph Lexley.

"To pass it over unnoticed is out of the question. It is a encouragement to wickedness."

"It cannot be passed over, Mr. Emlott. But I think it is the pastor's office to reprove as well as exhort. I will speak to him."

"You speak to him, indeed," answered Ebenezer contemptuously. "Why, you'll go drivelling and snivelling out some of your mild platitudes 'bout contrition and forgiveness, and then come away, and say as he's repentant, and it's aw' right, and things'll go on as afore. I'll not ha' it. Ralph Lexley shall be publicly ousted of his membership, and denounced as a warning to evildoers. You speak to him, indeed! I shall ha' a word to say about yourself, Mr. Juggins, at that meeting, I can tell you. You're as much i' Zion's hands as he is, and you shall both know it."

"We're both in God's hands. Thank God for it," said the minister fervently.

"That's hypocrisy, that is, Juggins," said Ebenezer with a sneer.

"He who utters base coin is sure to be suspicious of all coin he receives," said the minister, with a quiet dignity that well became him.

The reply enraged Ebenezer, and he went on his way, determined that Juggins should lower his flag before many days were over. He saw Scragg, and Bentham, and the rest of his fellow-officers, and a

meeting was arranged for Saturday night. But few would interfere till certain terms had been agreed upon. It was to be a general gathering. The subject was so momentous and so special—in fact, so altogether unprecedented, that Scragg and Bentham did not feel at liberty to act in such a representative capacity as the deaconship usually implied. They thought that certain other members of Zion should be invited privately. Above all, they were agreed to a man that nothing was to be said immediately to Mr. Lexley, and that he was to be kept in ignorance of the meeting until their decision had been made, and the time had come for that decision to be carried out. On these terms, Ebenezer's fellow-officers seemed rather pleased than otherwise at his suggestion, or rather demand. It would be a sensational meeting, and strong language would be used, and there was the bare possibility of a row. This, of course, was very delightful. Then it was a grand thing to be pronouncing sentence on such a man as Ralph Lexley. If he was a sinner, it must not be forgotten that he was a great sinner—that is, he was a sinner of the highest respectability. Mr. Juggins's objections were overruled, and the day, hour, and place of meeting were settled. I say overruled, but as Ebenezer undertook the arrangements, I fear he was scarcely consulted in the matter. Zion could not forget its past veneration, that had

amounted to something very like awe, of the Grange proprietor, and even now it was not unwilling that the onus of the transaction should fall upon the broad shoulders of Mr. Lexley's own brother-in-law. When he offered, therefore, to look after the matter, they assented with marked alacrity.

Since the day when first Ebenezer Emlott announced to him that his secret was out, a peculiar change had passed over Ralph. The little life that was in him seemed to have died out. If he had lived much within himself in the years that were past, he had at least on occasion come forth, to show that all spirit in him was not quite extinct. But now he had withdrawn himself into an inner chamber that was stiller than death, and there he abode. He spent much of his time in his library, but there was no litter, no papers lying about, no disturbed books, to show if it were but the pretence of study. If he went to the mill, he proceeded by unwonted and solitary paths. He would cross the meadows, and when he came to the outskirts of the town, he would steal along unfrequented streets, and through strange courts and alleys. At the mill itself he appeared absorbed in business, so absorbed that he had not time to meet the eye of his mill-hands. If business brought him face to face with a fellow-creature, the blood would rush to his cheeks, his lips would

falter, he would be overwhelmed with confusion. Then he would suddenly rise, take up his hat from its peg, and go home by the same devious route, and hide himself again in his chamber.

"Ralph, what is it?" asked Jane one day, taking away one of his hands gently from his face. She had entered his room without noise, and found him seated in his chair, and his head buried in his hands. Tears were streaming through his fingers.

He did not move.

"What is it, husband? I know that I have not had your entire confidence. I know that there has been some great trouble at your heart ever since—nay, before we were married. I did not ask you for it, it seemed too deep for words; and I thought in time you would tell it to me."

"I did intend you should know," he said, not looking up.

"I thought, too, that some day it might be necessary for you to tell me, and I waited. I have waited patiently, Ralph."

"You have been most noble."

"Has not the necessity reached you now? You have never been happy, but you are now most miserable. Is it not so?"

"God knows how wretched."

"You will tell me now?"

"I dare not. It is harder to speak now than then. Time has made the impossibility of speaking more impossible. I will tell you before I die. That act of justice shall at least be yours."

"Will you not tell me now?"

"I cannot. God forgive me!"

She bent down and kissed his forehead—how hot it was! She was about to steal away, when she came back, and stooped down and kissed his forehead again—how cold it was! With such sudden fluctuations how must the spirit be at conflict within! She went away with a like pain. Her own heart was dried up like a drought in summer. Poor woman! she had never known a happy day in her life. She, too, had carried a secret in her bosom. It was her husband's secret; and it was more weighty because she did not know what it was. The burden was upon her, and it was sealed. She had hoped against hope that some day all would be made clear; and now, on the only occasion she had spoken to him, her husband had told her that there was to be no unravelling of his sorrow. She could not help him, and this seemed to sum up her anguish. To know this was all that was wanting to fill her cup of trouble to the brim. Now she knew it!

Some secret instinct forbade her to consult her brother, but she would go to Mr. Juggins. He could

not help her, but he would whisper words of solace, that she did not dare to employ herself.

"You can guess why I am come, Mr. Juggins?"

"I think so. My heart bleeds for you all. It is the greatest trial of my ministerial life."

"You know his secret, then?" Mrs. Lexley flushed with a feeling of resentment. Her husband had told his pastor what he could not tell his wife.

"Not from Mr. Lexley's lips," he answered. He saw the flush, and surmised the cause.

"Is it—is it one that will bring sorrow—great sorrow?"

"Dear Mrs. Lexley, will you believe me when I assure you that I would tell you everything I know, if it were honourable to do so? This secret is one of a nature that should be disclosed to a woman by one person, and one alone—her own husband. Until he is brought to feel the necessity, nay, the obligation, to do so, I fear I should be exceeding my prerogative as your spiritual adviser to attempt it. The fact that your husband, for whom I have a regard at this moment greater than I ever had in my life before, does not see his way to that disclosure closes my own lips for the present."

"I will bear disgrace for him and with him, if I may but know what it is."

"You have children, Mrs. Lexley."

"I would guard his secret in their behalf. I claim my share of responsibility as their mother."

Nevertheless, Mr. Juggins did not disclose what he knew, and Jane Lexley ceased to press him. Indeed, before the conversation ended, she confessed that had she had time to think before setting forth, she would not have come to one who was not a member of the family for the purpose which had brought her. After all, she would hear it from her husband's lips, or none. Not even he who had the supervision of her spiritual interests should occupy that place which he alone could fulfil to her. To this view the worthy and kind-hearted pastor readily assented; and as she left the room, he said—

"I will tell you one thing, Mrs. Lexley. Whatever act of wrong has been committed by your husband, one other act of his in relation to the same has redeemed it in my eyes. He has done all that man can do to undo his fault. I do not say that his course of procedure was wise; but it was noble, and it was intended as an endeavour to set wrong right."

Jane Lexley dwelt on this much. And though she could not unravel its allusion—and of course she tried to do so—still it gave her comfort; at least, it gave her a little solace at the time, and she went home calmer, and a shade, too, more cheerful.

CHAPTER XVII.

"Brother, though I be youngest, give me leave."
King Henry VI., Part III.

ONE morning, about this same time of the projected meeting at the chapel, the Lexley family were at breakfast, when the servant came in, and asked if the squire would see Mr. Pitman, of the Westwood Cottage. Mr. Lexley went to him. He had come to say that his kitchen chimney had fallen down. The house was one of a row of three, his being the centre. Owing to a projected improvement of the road, one of the trio had been removed, and for the present wooden stays had been set up against the newly exposed wall of Pitman's dwelling. The chimney was uncared for as safe, although it, too, had lost a former support. An autumn gale the previous night—not a specially loud or blustering wind—had toppled it over, and one heavy piece of stone had fallen through the roof into a bedroom, thereby nearly killing a

servant-girl. Mr. Lexley was sympathetic, and promised that the business should be seen to at once.

"Will you call at Mr. Skillicorne's, and let him know?" asked his father of his eldest son. Skillicorne had come to be a kind of steward of the Grange property.

"I'll go, Johnnie. I've to go round that way to see Belkins. My bat's sprung, and we're to play Glapton on Saturday." It was arranged, therefore, that Geoffrey should go.

Having been to the mill and opened the letters, and attended to several little matters of morning superintendence, Geoffrey made his way to the attorney's office, and found Mr. Skillicorne at his desk, in his private chamber. The attorney, as soon as he saw his visitor, rose at once, pen in hand.

"Good morning, Mr. Geoffrey. Quite a pleasure, I may say a compliment, to see you." Mr. Skillicorne's tone was something more than bland. If he had not been the leading attorney one might have suggested that it was highly obsequious.

"I've come to speak about that cottage near Westwood Lodge. The chimney has fallen from Pitman's roof. It's been left unsupported, and it is to be repaired at once. A big stone has gone through into the bedroom, and that must be seen to, also."

The attorney smiled curiously. "Oh, we're be-

ginning to look after our rights in good time, are we?"

"I don't know what you mean by 'we,'" said Geoffrey somewhat stiffly. "My father has sent me, and all right in the matter lies with him."

"Of course, of course, Mr. Geoffrey. That's natural and dutiful, and very beautiful it is to witness, I am sure; but your father can't live for ever, no more than Nebuchadnezzar, though we might wish for it as much or as little as them Chaldeans did." The attorney still wore a smile which seemed to imply that there was a good deal under the surface of this remark which was quite understood by his young client.

"I hope he'll live fifty years yet," said the irritated young man.

"Of course, of course, Mr. Geoffrey. Very improper if you didn't. Make it a round hundred, if you like. But wishes can't keep your father alive no more than Nebuchadnezzar, though his friends went so far as to express a polite hope that he would realize the truth of the legal maxim that the king never dies." This was said with the utmost good-humour. The attorney thought very highly of Geoffrey for his part in the conversation. He was acting admirably. "So your father must go his way some day, you know."

"Very well, what's that to you?"

"Well, it's a good deal to me, Mr. Geoffrey, either

good or bad." Mr. Skillicorne's smile disappeared. At least, the old one went and another came, one of studied obsequiousness. He almost fawned upon the young man with his hands. "Your father's been a good friend to me, Mr. Geoffrey, and I have never been ashamed to own it. Many's the time I have said, and many's the time I shall say it again, that the first real lift I got after I set up in Lackington was by your father. Still he must die." Mr. Skillicorne's eyes went up to the ceiling as he said this. Perhaps he saw a fly there, perhaps he was kindly prophesying the direction in which he was sure his patron would go after his demise, for the lift already referred to. Then the smile returned. "And when he dies there must be a successor, you know, Mr. Geoffrey."

"If that's all you wanted to tell me, you've taken a long time about it."

"Well, I did not desire particularly to inform you of a fact so patent as that; but, putting two and two together, you know, I did think it very discreet of you to be looking after things in good time—getting your hand in, as it were." He gave Geoffrey a deliberate wink.

"So you think my brother cannot do anything himself?" Geoffrey was waxing wroth.

The attorney looked at his visitor, and then broke out into a loud fit of laughter. "Oh, that's a good

un, that is." Then he looked at Geoffrey again, and off he went into an explosion of merriment that made him pant for very breath. "Oh, but you does it well, Mr. Geoffrey—so innocent, so very innocent."

"What on earth do you mean?" cried Geoffrey, amazed at his words and rudeness alike. He thought Mr. Skillicorne was drunk.

"Oh, Mr. Geoffrey, please don't, or you will be the death o' me. I always said that you was the clever one of the family—I did indeed; never saw anything done better in my life. Excuse me, dear Mr. Geoffrey," and off for the third time went the attorney into a paroxysm of mirth. Geoffrey sat silent, but indignant. The legal agent saw it.

"I hope Johnnie will do well, I'm sure. I've no feeling against him, none at all; but right's right."

Geoffrey jumped up. "Look here, Mr. Skillicorne, you've called me Mr. Geoffrey throughout this visit—a thing you've never done before; and for some reason best known to yourself, you have been uncommonly obsequious in your manner to me. Up to a fortnight or three weeks ago, you were wont to address my eldest brother with something very like cringing deference, and you invariably Mister-John'd him when circumstances brought his name into conversation. Pray explain yourself."

The attorney ceased his banter, and looked serious.

He stared at his young visitor with unaffected curiosity—not to say anxiety. Could it be possible that Geoffrey did not know his legal position in respect of the Grange estate? He must hark back as quickly as possible. Already his rudeness might have ruined his chance of continuing in the stewardship.

"I beg your pardon, Mr. Geoffrey. It's only my fun, you know. I must have my joke. Mrs. Skillicorne says, 'Joshua, laugh it all out now, for it must come sooner or later.' Very sensible woman Mrs. Skillicorne, Mr. Geoffrey."

"I object to jokes about my father's death. Besides, you have not answered my question relative to your changed conduct to myself and Johnnie." Geoffrey was uneasy. He did not like that look of surprised apprehension in the attorney's face, and he had used some strange words.

"It was that I was smiling—well, laughing at, if you will. You act for Mr. John so much, that people have begun to talk and joke about it, that's all. I'll see after the chimney, Mr. Geoffrey. I see you're in a hurry."

The explanation was a natural one, and for the moment satisfied his interlocutor. Nevertheless, as he went out, Geoffrey could not help wondering why Mr. Skillicorne had so quickly changed his tone.

It was as if he had changed some hidden cue at the same time.

He thought about it a good deal that day. He revolved it in his mind as he lay in bed that night.

"I say, Johnnie." Johnnie was in another bed three yards distant. The two had slept in the same room for many years now.

"Yes, Gip," replied his brother drowsily.

"It's no good."

"What's no good?"

"It's no good my hoping that Cécile will change her mind. I've been thinking about it from first to last, and I've made up my mind to give it up. It's hopeless. She doesn't love me enough to marry me, and never will."

Johnnie's heart gave a great thump against his ribs, and he was wide awake in an instant.

"What makes you think so?"

"I might as well make a clean breast of it. I told you all that happened at the time, and I then said that I thought she might change her mind. Do you remember?"

"Yes," said Johnnie with a shiver.

"I thought wrongly. Somehow I've had a kind of knack of getting my own way in most things. I do believe this is the first time I have ever been really thwarted in that upon which my desires have been

set. I'm afraid I've bullied you sometimes into giving way to me."

"Never, Gip," said Johnnie quickly.

"You say that, and mean it, because you are so unselfish. But, I say, old fellow, I've been pondering that same thing in my mind the last day or two—this disappointment had compelled me to do so—and I find I've been a selfish brute. There now, don't deny it; it is true."

"I have never found you selfish."

"I've been more selfish to you than any one else. I know exactly how it stands. I've stuck to you, and helped to pull you through your troubles when Uncle Ben has been awkward, or inclined to cut up rough about anything. But any fellow with a dash of pluck in him would do that. What I've been selfish in is this. I've never self-sacrificed myself for you—never gone to any trouble for you. What some people call easy-goingness means nothing more than selfish indolence. Wait a moment, don't interrupt the court. Then I've ordered you about as if I'd been your big brother—told you to do this, and to do that. Any one would think that I was the eldest son, and heir to about six times as much as will come to you some day."

"I liked it, you know, Gip. That's all my doing."

"Of course you liked it," went on Geoffrey impulsively. "You're such a peaceable and unobtrusive

old chap. You are too meek-spirited, and I've taken advantage of it."

"You've taken no advantage of me. It's my natural disposition to be shy and quiet. It's I that have been selfish in letting you do everything for me, taking my part, doing the talking for me, helping me out of my blunders, assisting my nervousness in company, and a heap of other things; but somehow—I don't exactly know how it is—I daren't do anything by myself, and you've always been so ready, and near at hand, that I've come to fall back upon you."

"I've made up my mind, Johnnie," said Geoffrey decidedly.

"About what?"

"That it's a mistake, and we must undo it."

"What's a mistake?"

"This arrangement by which you seem to be dependent upon me—not that you are so really—you're much cleverer than I am at the bottom. It's become a difficulty."

"I don't see," rejoined his brother.

"Why, people are beginning to treat me as if I was the top-sawyer of the two. I nearly kicked Skillicorne out of his office this morning."

"I saw you were hot and flushed when you came back from his rooms. I was sure something had happened."

"Ay, and something worse nearly happened. I was within an ace of laying the knob of my stick on his head—the old, canting, smooth-faced hypocrite!"

"That's strong language, Gip," said Johnnie, laughing.

"He spoke slightingly of you."

"That's becoming an old tale." The elder brother spoke lightly, but he winced at the words.

"But that's not all. I had to speak to him about that cottage near the West Lodge. What do you think he said when I mentioned it?"

"I don't know."

"He smiled in a curious way, and said, 'Oh, we're beginning to look after our rights in good time, are we?' He actually spoke as if I was heir to the estate, and you a nobody. He's an insolent rascal!"

"He's a little queer at times, but he's not a bad sort of fellow. Besides, I often think it would have been much better had you been the eldest."

"Not a bit of it."

"You're so much better able to bear its responsibilities than I am."

"I say, Johnnie."

"Well, Gip?"

"I vote that from this night we never talk in that way again. We've encouraged one another in

it too much. Do you know, I think it is this that explains this mystery about you and me. I thought perhaps it was because they fancied you had shoved out Ben from his place in the mill. It's not that. They're beginning to set you down as a fool. You're so diffident, and reticent, and shy, that they're making out that you have no sense, and that I have to do everything for you. I see it clearly now."

"Perhaps they are not altogether wrong," said Johnnie, quietly, but sadly. A suppressed sob seemed to come from his bed.

Geoffrey sat up. "You are crying, Johnnie. Come into my bed."

Johnnie prepared to do so.

"No, that won't do. That's ordering you about in the way people have noticed. We are to begin on a new plan to-night. I'll come to you."

Neither could help laughing as Johnnie tumbled back into his own bed, and Gip followed. "Hurrah, Johnnie, we've started; no going back, you know! Mind you bully me properly; speak loudly, and in a stout, imperative tone. It'll be rare fun to see Uncle Ben's astonishment!" The idea of Uncle Ben's amazement was too much for the two. The bed groaned again with their convulsed merriment.

"I say, Gip, just tumble out, and wind up my watch, will you?" said Johnnie, abruptly.

Geoffrey sat on his haunches. It was very queer. For the life of him he could not recollect his brother having made such a request before. There was nothing strange in the demand itself, yet somehow it was the oddest thing in the world. He couldn't account for it.

"Where is it, Johnnie?" he asked in a puzzled voice.

Johnnie's laughter could not be controlled. "I'm only practising. It'll come easier by-and-by."

This tickled Geoffrey most of all. It was well the ribs of the bed were of sturdy manufacture, else there is no telling what might not have happened to them and to those who lay above them.

"It's not bad for a beginner," said Geoffrey; "but you must speak more authoritatively than that. The order was all right, but the tone was too much that of entreaty—too meek by half."

"I shall improve in time," responded his brother, in a saucy voice.

"And now, Johnnie, what were you crying about?"

"I wasn't crying, Gip."

"Well, nearly crying."

"I wonder if I dare tell you?"

"Do, there's a good fellow."

"You say that you have given up all hope of Cécile Marnott consenting to be your wife. Have

you finally decided about yourself? Is it possible that you should change your mind, and again seek her?"

"It is impossible. My mind is made up. That is why I spoke; it seemed to ratify my intention. Telling you was like taking an oath on the subject."

"You saw Cécile's manner to me the day before yesterday?"

"Yes."

"How cold she was! How anxious she appeared to hasten on and leave me!"

"I am afraid she was. I don't know why."

"Do you think there is any chance for me?"

"Oh, Johnnie!"

"And if there was, whether it would be painful to you to see me successful?"

There was a short pause, and then Geoffrey said, "Whatever pain I might naturally feel would last but a little time, and your joy would endure to your life's end. I wish you might win her, Johnnie, but I fear there is no chance."

"Ah!" gasped his brother.

"I fear not. 'Tis better to say it."

Johnnie answered with but a deeper sigh.

"She loves some one else. I believe he is not in Lackington at all—some fellow she has met with in earlier days. That is my impression, and I have watched her closely."

It never occurred to Geoffrey that this idea of his brother's was anything but spontaneous. He thought that Johnnie had formed his resolve on the spur of the moment, as soon as he had heard of his own non-success. He forgot to connect it with that half-stifled sob which had caught his ear but a few minutes before. He interwove it rather with the preceding subject of conversation, and was dimly impressed with an opinion that his brother was intending to establish himself in his newly-instituted character as an independent agent by making love boldly to the prettiest girl of their acquaintance. For one fleeting moment, too, he was not sure that Johnnie was not testing his own self-proffered subservience by selecting her as the object of his affections who had before this been the object of his own. It was this that made him pause. It was this that made him a little sore. There is no denying that he felt just a little injured.

When at length he had spoken, he had told his brother he had no chance. He thought it. In his heart his argument had run thus, though perhaps he was not aware of it.—"If Cécile cannot love me, how can she love poor Johnnie?" Never a man more loving, more amiable, than his brother; but women did not take to men whose best points were of kin to their own. They looked for contrast. If they loved tenderness in men, it must be the tenderness of strength

aware of its own power—quite a different quality from that of their own sex. They loved strong, impetuous, impulsive men—men firmly knit, broadly made, and braced with thew and sinew. Johnnie had both tenderness and strength, but they were of a feminine order—moral and spiritual rather than physical. Women were truthful, men confident; therefore, too, they loved self-reliance in men, and nerveless diffidence would be proportionately at a discount. Thus Geoffrey argued—for I am but stating his own view. Thus he came to the conclusion that Johnnie, weak in body, distrustful of self, and in general of a bashful habit, would have but a poor chance where he himself had failed.

CHAPTER XVIII.

"I think I told your lordship, a year since, how much I am in the favour of Margaret, the waiting gentlewoman to Hero."—*Much Ado About Nothing.*

THE parsonage was thrown into a complete ferment when the news of Cécile's good fortune was announced. It was looked upon as a set off against Mr. Haddock's mischance in the matter of the new church. The salary was large, and this was not all. Cécile's guardians were well aware that at Grewby House their niece would be well cared for. From the little that she had said about the Blands—and her lips were now unclosed—it was evident that the poor girl had suffered much hardship. She had been browbeaten and despised; she had been treated with ignominy and scorn. All this was at an end. Mr. Grewby was a gentleman of the old school, and his age and character for benevolence alike promised that she would meet with tender regard.

As for Cécile herself, after she had become

reconciled to a five days' absence from the parsonage she was in ecstasies. She had been pleased with the old gentleman's face and manner. She would have the free run of the park, with its exquisite scenery, its swelling uplands, its wooded knolls, and sweetly depressed vale through which the Scudd threaded in devious manner its clear and sparkling path. The idea of a single pupil, too, had great charms to her. She could expend her whole vigour upon her education; she could surrender herself to one duty. Mutual attraction would be more lavish in its displays betwixt one and one, than betwixt one on one side and two on the other. Jealousies and heartburnings would be out of the question. There would be no more calculations how to adjust properly the balance of affection. She had no fears about the child herself. It was an understood thing that she was very nice, and that the ebb and flow of love between the two would be undisturbed by any wild storm of disobedience, or outburst of passion.

"I am glad to see you, my dear," said Mr. Grewby. "Minnie, this is Miss Marnott. I hope you will do all that she tells you, and learn to love her very quickly."

The child came forward, and Cécile at once met her, and kissed her. It was an ordinary thing to do, but it pleased the old gentleman immensely.

"We shall do capitally—eh, Kitty?"

"Ay, ay, I knowed something o' Miss Marnott afore I mentioned her to you," replied the woman, with a look of proud satisfaction.

"You attend my uncle's church, I think?" said Cécile, looking up at the housekeeper.

"Yes, and always shall while he's there. He's hardworking, and hasna any false pride. Besides, he preaches the gospel."

"When shall we begin school, grandpapa?" inquired Minnie. She had begun to "Grandpapa" him from the first.

"There must be no talk of schooling on the first day. You must give Miss Marnott time to look about her. She doesn't even know where to put her parasol yet." Cécile was holding it in her hand. "She must be shown her room, and the house, and the park. I dare say she hasn't seen your dovecote, or the hares in the Thickset Wood."

"Oh, how nice! Then I may take her round?" Minnie's eyes were lustrous with delight. She seized Cécile's hand to lead her out.

"Tut, tut. Your part will keep till after lunch. At present Miss Marnott must be placed under Kitty's charge. You can go with them, I dare say."

Cécile's bedroom was, to her mind, a perfect paradise. There was a look of old-fashioned luxury about it, without the discomforts that generally attend

old-fashioned appurtenances. The dark oaken chairs were not straight-backed, and the hard seats were cushioned with velvet. The bed was small and light, and modern. There was neither canopy nor curtain to stifle the occupant, while the white purity of the bed-linen, and its lavender scent, made Cécile all but long for bedtime that she might get into it. As for the room itself, it was somewhat low-roofed and oblong; the ceiling was deeply barred in squares; and there was an oriel window, supported below by the most quaint of brackets—but this, of course, she could not see. This recess added to the quaintness of the room by being thrown out from the corner, and as the chamber itself lay at the extreme end of the west side of the house, it afforded a double, almost a triple, view of the park. In this oriel was set a low, antique table, and around it a couch-seat, which was part of the fixtures of the recess. A few books lay on the table, with ink and pens. It was a charming little boudoir in itself. Cécile expressed her rapture, and Catharine looked gratified.

"The master's had a good deal to do wi' it. He's bin popping in morn, noon, and night sin' Monday arternoon. He says, 'Kitty, do you see to th' bed, and dressing-table, and wash-stand, and I'll see to th' rest.'"

"How kind!" murmured the governess.

"Kind! God forgi'e me, I was nearly saying as it's no credit to him, for he knows no better, or worse, as one may say. It's like measles, is soft-heartedness wi' him; it's there, and it mun come out. There's some folk as you can't get a word o' affectionateness from, do h'soever you will. You might as well get a-gate tickling a corpse as try and move their feelin's. But master's not one o' them sort. He's all graciousness, he is."

"Can he be firm?" asked Cécile, curiously.

"That's his weakness. You've just hit it; though how you dun that, I doan't know. He's a kind o' martyr to his own goodness o' heart. He's took in o' every side; and th' worst on 'em as does it is his own sarvants."

"But cannot you dismiss them. You are the head of the household, are you not?"

Catharine smiled. "There's upper sarvants, and there's lower sarvants. There's sarvants inside, and there's sarvants outside. Outside's out o' my ordering, and inside's atwixt me and Mr. Hooper the butler. There's where it is. Master can't make up his mind. Now I'm missis, then Mr. Hooper's master. When he's out, I'm in; when he's in, I'm nowhere for a bit."

"Is Mr. Grewby so fickle in his affections?" asked Cécile, somewhat alarmed.

"Oh, bless your heart alive! it's not affection I'm

talking about. I'm safe enow there. It's his will as wavers, not his heart. He falls back o' everybody's opinion, without being contented wi' one's. First he consults me, then he sends for Mr. Hooper, and then Mr. Hooper has to give way to Mr. Cooper, as has bin fetched o' purpose from the cottage. Who can be mistress when that kind o' game 's being played o'er day after day?"

"It must be awkward, certainly."

"Awkward! There's that Mr. Cooper—imperdent fellow! I knows what he wants; and for th' matter o' that, Mr. Hooper, too. Well, he comes in on a' average about three times every two days. And he has his talk wi' master; and the upshot is as he gets his leave to do 'xactly what he comed for. Then Mr. Hooper goes in—perhaps with master's lunch—and he has his talk and he comes out, and tells me as he's going to do this and that i' the house. And where am I, who's bin about the house these thretty years back? There's Polly the kitchen-maid looks at me sometimes as if I wur nowt else but a cucumber o' th' ground, and all on th' strength o' Mr. Hooper's liberty to do as he inclines to. Men's all well out o' doors; but inside, if they meddle they mar. If I'd had no will o' my own, I doan't know what things would ha' comed to."

"Then there is some one with a will in the house," said Cécile, smiling.

"Eh, child, what should we come to if there warn't?"

"Mr. Hooper and Mr. Cooper don't get it all their own way, then?"

"Well, I mun confess, when all's said and done, there's little as takes place wi'out my ordering," replied the housekeeper, good-humouredly. Th' fact is, I likes a bit o' a grumble now and then, especially if it's a fresh body as is listening to me. It's like winding up a clock; it cries out very discontented like as th' key is a-gate, but it goes aw' the better arterwards. It freshens me up for my wark."

"Then, Mr. Hooper is not so autocratic as you said?"

"What's that you say?"

"Mr. Hooper does not get his own way, after all?"

The housekeeper laughed contemptuously. "I should jist like to see him, that's all. No; if a house is to go on properly, there must be but one head; and—well, men's aw' reet i' their way; but you'll find it out yerself i' good time. My dear, they're a weak, finikin kind o' creature, at th' best."

With this confidential statement Catharine left the governess to her own devices. The first thing she did was to unpack her box—I would have said boxes, but she had only one. Her resources in the way of dress were small. This task was soon

accomplished, therefore. Then she arranged her toilette for lunch, and then she sate down in the oriel and feasted herself with the landscape. It was not all joy with her. There was still the aching at her heart about Johnnie Lexley. But here she knew, if anywhere, she might speedily attain a certain calmness and tranquillity of life which many another woman under different circumstances, but in a like trouble, would have found it impossible to reach. Here was the novelty of a new life, the preparation for fresh duties, the soothing power of kindly treatment, and, above all, the quieting influences of a landscape of rare beauty, amid which it would be hers to wander and forget all that was regretful of the past. Pain, which others had to crush out, she might here cheat herself of, if only time were given her.

A knock at the door recalled her from the future to the present.

"Lunch is waiting, miss." It was the butler. How small and fat he was!—how quietly consequential!

"I'm sure we shall be satisfied, miss." This he said as Cécile descended the stairs. The tone was encouraging, and yet admonitory.

"I hope so," replied Cécile, rather aghast.

"It's a important business is this selecting of a young lady as is to be governess to a child o' sich

tender years as Miss Milton. But I was brought round as soon as I yerd who you was. Besides, Mrs. Kitty knew you, and that was a consideration i' my eyes. Mrs. Kitty is a fine woman," he added, dropping his voice into a stage-whisper.

"Very," responded Cécile, amused.

"You can tell her as I chanced to make the observation," he added eagerly.

"I shall be very happy," rejoined the governess, who began to suspect how the land lay.

"I've a great respect for Mrs. Kitty. If she should ever light upo' me i' her talk, you can tell her as I said so, quite casual-like. You understand me—casual-like. Casual-like allus comes wi' more force. You may add as I happened to say, in a incidental kind o' way, as I considered her the finest woman, and the one as wore the best o' all the women as ever I seed anywheers—you may, now."

"I will not forget," answered Cécile, laughing.

Lunch passed off comfortably. Mr. Grewby sat at the head of the table. He ate but little himself, but seemed anxious about the other two.

"You will take a little more mutton, Miss Marnott?"

"No, thank you."

"I'm afraid you are delicate." His countenance changed instantly into a look of tender concern.

"Oh no; I'm very strong," said Cécile, laughing.

"I hope so. But young people should eat."

After lunch, Minnie was able to secure the governess to herself. The first thing she did was to take her on a tour of inspection. Already, her pets were many. A sagacious spaniel was the primary object of her affections, and this therefore was honoured by the first visit. Then an old tom-cat, remarkable for the length and whiteness of his whiskers, claimed her regard. Then came the ring-doves, and half a dozen young rabbits.

"When will the pen be ready, Mr. Cooper?" Minnie asked, as they saw that individual approach.

"In a day or two at most. The carpenter's at work on it now. Good arternoon, miss. Glad to see you; hope you'll be comfortable, I'm sure. Having brought you here, it's only fair as we should try to make you happy."

It seemed to Cécile as if they had all been the means of installing her at Grewby.

"I can't allus be here myself, my work lying out o' doors like, but I'll do my best for you. You mun get on th' right side o' Mrs. Catharine, and then you'll do."

"I mean to do that," replied the governess, laughing.

"She's a soft-hearted woman when you come to know her."

"Mr. Hooper considers her a very fine woman," said Cécile, a little mischievously.

"Did he say that to you?" asked the steward quickly.

"He made some such remark. I shall ask Catharine if there's anything in it, I think," replied Cécile.

"Do," said Cooper, eagerly. "Do, there's a good young lady; and"—sinking his voice—"just let me know, will you? You needn't say owt about my asking you.—I'm feart there's summat in it, after aw'," he added to himself.

Minnie took Cécile on to the Thickset Wood, and Mr. Cooper ruminated for some minutes on the spot where the new pen for the rabbits was to be set up. As he was thus lost in reflection, the butler came out of the kitchen door.

Mr. Cooper surveyed him from head to foot with calm disdain.

"When's th' pen to be ready, Mr. Cooper?"

"Mr. Hooper, you and me's bin associated for a good length o' years now, and it's time as we knowed our respective places."

"So we do, doan't we?"

"May I ask what you mean, then, by axing me when that rabbit-cote's to be ready?"

"I on'y axed out o' curiosity; it warn't a orficial question."

The long, spare man looked at him with a glance of contempt.

"So you've the imperdence to think as Mrs. Catharine's a fine woman, 'ave you?"

"Coom, coom, Mr. Cooper, there's no harm i' praising a woman for her looks," responded the little man, trembling.

"You mun praise some other woman than Mrs. Catharine, then. I don't choose to have my woife as is to be the subject o' sich indeligate observashuns."

"Your woife!" gasped the butler.

"As is to be," said Mr. Hooper.

"Then you've made it up sin' last I seed you, have you?" asked the fat man with tremulous excitement. "You've spoke to her?"

"Mr. Hooper, you doan't understand these kind o' things. Love as is love, don't deal mich i' words."

"No; one's feart-like," assented Hooper.

"It's looks as mainly does it."

"Ay, ay, so as they bean't aw' o' one side. I've guv' Mrs. Catharine mony a look as well as you."

"She's guv' me looks back agen."

"So she's guv' me looks, too."

"It's no good argifying wi' sich a dull, turmit-headed, num-skulled fellow as you. I s'pose you

hain't hintellect enow to know as there's two kinds o' looks?"

"O' coorse there is."

"I've seen looks as 'ud make a chap shrivvil up just like a chip shoved i'to the bars o' a fire-grate."

"Ay, they do look severe sometoimes, there's no gainsaying."

"I've seen looks, too, so fair and be-utiful, as sheds a rich and gowlden glow upon you—as—as permeates like the moisture—dew I mean for to say, o' spring."

"Ain't much work for permeation to do i' your inside, I should say," rejoined the other, gazing at the steward's spare and attenuated figure.

"Well, I ain't a barrel o' grease, I ain't; so p'raps I stands i' less risk o' that nor you."

"I'd sooner be a whole barrel wi' summat in it nor jist one o' its staves as couldna stand up wi'out being propped-like." Mr. Cooper was leaning against the wall.

"Your sarcasms falls harmless, Mr. Hooper. It's but nattral that you should feel your position; it's humiliating, o' coorse."

"What's humiliating?"

"Living on th' very spot, and bein' cut out by me, as on'y drops in occasionally like."

"How dun I know as you've cut me out? You han't spoken to her."

Mr. Cooper gazed for several moments on Mr. Hooper with a glance of the utmost commiseration. "I can't find it i' my heart to be hard on you, Mr. Hooper. You don't understand these things, and I doubts me you never will. It's enough that me and Mrs. Catharine understands each other."

"How dun I know as you understands one another?" rejoined the butler, doggedly.

The steward renewed his look of compassionate pity. "I'm sorry for you, Mr. Hooper. I'd ha' broke it to you more gently if I'd knowed how you'd ha' felt it. Good-day. You'll get over it, you will; but, as you said, she's a fine woman, and I'm sorry for you."

"I wish I'd pluck enow to ax her whether he's telling lies or no," said the butler to himself, as he walked back to the kitchen door with a disconsolate air.

CHAPTER XIX.

"Why appear you with this ridiculous boldness before my lady?"
Twelfth Night.

MEANWHILE, Cécile, led by her pupil, sauntered onwards to the Thickset Wood—one of those sweet and retired woodland haunts that may be found in most gentlemen's parks. It lay on a rising and yet undulating ground. The trees, large and small together, were so closely planted that the foliage looked absolutely impenetrable. It seemed like a huge parachute four acres in extent. The place was far prettier, however, than such an unpoetic illustration would suggest. The trees were of every kind; and the diversity of colour in the leaves was charming. Every tint of green was there—not to speak of pines that were well-nigh black, and beeches that seemed like statues of trees cast in bronze.

The mosses and grasses beneath were cool and inviting; and it was here, on the border of the wood,

on the inner side of the hedge, that the two girls sate them down. It had not been an easy thing to get there, however, for the hawthorn quickset was high; and it was only by taking a circuitous route, and climbing a stile, that they found ingress. They had reached in their walk the highest corner of the park, and the main road lay behind the big, high wall on the more elevated side.

"Why have they put up a post there, Miss Marnott?" asked Minnie, pointing to a notice-board which stood where wood, park, and turnpike met.

"To warn trespassers."

"There is writing on it?"

"Yes. It says, 'Trespassers will be prosecuted. By order.'"

"Whose order? Mr. Grewby's?"

"Yes."

"What does 'prosecuted' mean?"

"The trespasser will be brought before the magistrate in order that, if found guilty, he may be punished."

"Would he be put into prison, and fed with bread and water?"

"He might be, if the law took a harsh view of his act."

The child looked puzzled. "I thought grandpapa was a good man. He is, isn't he?"

"I hope so, Minnie. Why do you ask?"

"I say every night and morning, 'Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive them that trespass against us.' Grandpapa says I must never forget to say it, and to do it. He said last night, when I sat on his knee before going to bed, that it was no good saying these things if we did not do them. Why must I forgive trespasses, if he doesn't?"

The governess looked slightly puzzled herself. "You don't quite understand. That notice-board is set up as a warning beforehand, so that they may be prevented committing the trespass. To trespass is to pass beyond the boundary of another man's property. The main road there belongs to everybody; but if a man were to cross that hedge and come into this meadow, or wood, he would be trespassing; he would be on Mr. Grewby's land without leave, or business, and therefore liable to a summons for wrongdoing. It's a warning."

"Then, if I had said to Lilly Mackrey—she's in India," added the child—"'If you slap me again, Lilly, I'll run this pin into your leg, right up to the head,' that would have been all right, I suppose? It would be a warning beforehand, you know."

Cécile was relieved from the dilemma in which she had brought herself. There was a rustling noise

behind them in the wood; and almost before they had time to spring upon their feet, to their increased alarm a voice in the rear said—

"Why, Terry, she's here!—if that ain't curious."

"It's a trespasser," whispered Minnie, clinging to Cécile's dress.

Cécile was not a coward, but she felt her heart sink like a piece of lead when she saw the new comer, or rather the part of him that was as yet visible. Certainly his head and shoulders did not speak inspiringly of that which, in reasonable course, might be expected to follow. It—the head, I mean, that was bending over the brushwood—had no hat on, and its hair was thick black, and all betangled and matted. Its eyes were wild and bloodshot; its nose fearfully cut, and swollen into the size of three. The lips and chin hung down in a helpless, loutish kind of fashion, as if the owner had in him neither physical nor moral stamina enough to keep them up to an average honest level. So much of his coat as could be seen hung loosely about him, and so did a general air of rascality. Altogether, he was an object to be avoided; but it required little discernment to see that he was more hideous than hurtful, more repulsive than dangerous.

He looked on Cécile with a strange leer of curiosity. "Terry, come forruds; she's yer——"

"I wish I could gag that mouth of yours," said a

shrill, clear voice in the rear—very like the rasping of a file it sounded.

"I tell ye, she's here; the very young lady herself."

There was a crackling and tearing, and breaking of brushwood, and then a female issued forth. Cécile—who had somehow recovered her courage, probably from sheer desperation, for she was effectually pinned into a corner, and could not escape without clambering the hedge behind her, or the wall at her side—felt more fear of her than the other, woman as she was. She was respectably dressed, tall, and sharp-featured, younger by a considerable number of years than her companion, and foreign-looking. Cécile was sure she was not English. She was almost equally assured that she was French. The contour of the face was familiar. Individually, she was sure she had never set eyes on her before; nationally, she seemed to recognize her at a glance. Having spent several years of her life in Paris, she was more likely to detect a characteristic of this kind. The woman was not without a certain beauty, but it was hard, cold, and glittering. Secrecy and cunning looked out of her fixed grey eye, while an invincible determination marked her thin and compressed lips as its own.

"You besotted idiot! She must have heard you."

Cécile could see that she held the man's arm as in a vice. He gave a start of pain. "Hold off your hand, can't ye!"

"Fool! if you open your mouth again, I'll stop your drink for a month."

"I'll be quiet, if you'll on'y leave go o' my arm. It's on'y a threat, now, Terry, isn't it?"

"I've done it before, and I'll do it again."

"I'll say nothing, I promise you. Come, say now, it was on'y a threat, wasn't it?"

"Cease your gabble, and lie down there till I've done."

"Mum's the word, Terry."

Cécile, whose ears were sharpened with combined fear and curiosity, had caught enough of this whispered colloquy to see that she had nothing to dread from the abject being who presumably was the husband of the other.

"Good afternoon, my fine young lady. This is a beautiful park for you to walk in."

"The park is very beautiful. I do not know whether you are aware, however, that it is private property, and that Mr. Grewby is somewhat particular in respect of trespassers."

The woman was looking intently on Cécile. She seemed to have listened absently to her delicate intimation.

"Ay, Mr. Grewby's park, of course. That's the house, isn't it?"

"Yes."

"He's a bachelor, I've heard say." The woman spoke in a softer voice; but the effort to make it so was manifest, and Cécile felt a growing distrust of her. But she must not offend her needlessly. The advantage was all on the woman's side.

"Yes."

"Is this the young lady that is come from India?"

"You know that?" asked Cécile, surprised.

"Some one was telling me that a young lady was expected from Bombay, or Calcutta, I forget which. I did not pay close attention to the statement, as it did not concern me at all, and I only know the Grewbys by hearsay."

"You live in the neighbourhood, then?" Cécile's one idea was to maintain a friendly converse, if possible, till such time as help came, or she could contrive a method of escape.

"No; a few miles away, in the direction of Newsham. Of course the names of the leading gentry are always familiar. One sees their names as magistrates in the papers—or at the hunt. 'Great folk is known to more than great folk knows'—that's a local saying, I believe."

"He wouldna be a great 'un if right was right, young lady. Get on wi' it, will you, Terry, and let's go an' have some drink," blurted out the man, who was out of sight.

A kick followed this suggestion, and a whispered objurgation, which the governess could not catch—and perhaps as well she didn't. Minnie clung to her dress in speechless terror. She had never opened her lips since first the horrid face appeared above the brushwood. Her countenance was blanched with horror.

"I suppose you're a relation of the old gentleman's—eh?"

The woman's eye seemed to pierce her through and through, Cécile thought. Her fear became more definite. She wished somebody would come along the main road above. If she heard steps she determined that she would scream.

"Oh no. I had never met him before I came here," she answered, listening intently. "That is to say, I never met him till he came to Uncle Haddock's, to offer me the situation of companion and governess to my charge here."

"He would never have thought of having you had not this pretty young lady come from India, then?" The questioner was close to them now, and affected to fondle Minnie with her hand. The child convulsively seized upon Cécile's arm, and began to sob in a stifled, frightened manner. "Don't fear, my pretty little dear, I shan't hurt you. As I was saying, he hadn't thought of you coming till this

little lady was sent to him for a gift? A pretty gift to send an old gentleman, I'm sure!"

"It's just as dangerous, whether he did or no," said a subdued, thick voice below. Another kick, and whisper.

Cécile fancied she heard a faint step on the high-road in the distance.

"I do not know what right you have to ask such a question," she said, boldly.

"Oh, no right, ma'am—only curiosity, so to say. As a mere matter of curiosity, now, did he?" From the carelessness of her tone, her curiosity might have been the most objectless, spontaneous thing in the world.

"I decline to enter into such a subject with a total stranger, and I must again remind you that you are trespassing on private property." Cécile was sure somebody was coming now.

"So we are recovering our courage, and in danger of becoming heroic, now that we hear a step on the road, are we? Never mind, Miss Marnott, you'll be more civil the next time we meet. I will tell you a secret, since you refuse to impart one to me. I came into this wood in the hope of seeing you, and I have been fortunate enough to find you. I may add, before wishing you good afternoon, that, short as has been our conversation, your frankness has

been such that it has quite satisfied me on the subject which brought me. My object is attained. As a rule, I would advise you to be less confidential with strangers. Get up, Miles, you besotted wretch!" she added, giving him a heavy shove with her foot.

The man got up, once more showed his blotched face over the natural fence, gave a leer, and, with the woman, had in another moment disappeared within the darker recesses of the wood.

Minnie sobbed in Cécile's lap, and refused to stir from the spot.

"What can she possibly mean?" thought Cécile, whose courage had given way under the woman's strange, glittering look and extraordinary language.

The pedestrian on the road was now upon them, so the sound of feet seemed to declare. She roused herself to step a yard or two forward. She had to drag Minnie with her, as she still clung to her dress.

"Mr. Lexley, is that you?" she cried, recognizing with a cry of deep thankfulness his peculiar tread.

"Cécile — Miss Marnott — where are you?" responded a voice on the other side. The wall completely hid the two from one another's eyes.

"Please, help us quickly." It was evident all her bravery had ebbed away. She was trembling in every limb. She could have fainted, but by an effort of will she did not.

"What is the matter?" said Johnnie, as he scaled the wall.

"We have been dreadfully alarmed. A man and woman came suddenly upon us out of the wood, and would persist in talking to us. The man was drunk, and the woman fierce and threatening. I don't know why."

"Which way did they go?"

"Through that opening above. Oh, you must not follow them, Mr. Lexley; they would kill you!"

"Don't go," pleaded Minnie, finding her voice at last, but trembling like a leaf.

Johnnie resolved in his mind to track the trespassers; but first he would see Cécile and her charge in safety to the house. He seized Minnie's hand, and helped her over the fence at the point where they had entered the wood. Cécile followed, and, once in the open headland, their fears began to wane.

"She was such a cruel-faced woman," said Cécile, with a tremor in her voice.

"You are safe now, at any rate," replied Johnnie, soothingly. "I wish I had come sooner."

"Had you come two minutes later I think we should both have fainted. Indeed, I think Minnie was unconscious for several moments. I do not know how to thank you. It seems as if I were doomed to be under obligations to you, Mr. John."

Though she confessed it with thankful readiness, there was a suppressed feeling of aggrievance that such should be the case. It seemed one more hardship of her associations with Johnnie.

"I would die in your defence, gladly," said John, excitedly. "I'm a great coward; but when you are in danger, I don't know what fear is."

Cécile blushed. "You are very good," she murmured.

"It's easy to be good," he said. His heart was beating very wildly, in great, uneven throbs. "If I thought I could be near you at all times of your peril, I should be the happiest man in the world."

These sudden protestations, uttered with a tender and yet agitated earnestness, threw Cécile into a tremor which, with her already weakened nerves, she felt it would be impossible to hide. She seized Minnie's hand and hurried on.

"You will come in, and let Mr. Lexley thank you? His little granddaughter, as he calls her, is very dear to him."

Johnnie was bent on tracking the footsteps of the pair. He refused the invitation, under plea of pressure of time, and as soon as he had passed out of sight of the house, struck boldly into the wood. He tracked their course through broken underwood to the main road, but there all clue was necessarily lost. He went homewards, vexed and disappointed.

CHAPTER XX.

"About noon, Sir J. Robinson, Lord Mayor, desiring way through the garden from the Tower, called in at the office, and there invited me and Sir W. Pen, who happened to be in the way, to dinner, and we did go. And there had a great Lent dinner of fish, little flesh."—PEPYS'S *Diary*.

IT is a peculiarity of some animals to play with their smaller adversary before the final stroke of the paw or shake of the teeth is administered. There was a good deal of this feline instinct in Ebenezer Emlott's constitution. It is only this that can account for his appearing at the breakfast-table of the Grange on the morning of the day that was to witness the extraordinary meeting in Zion Chapel.

The deacon had ever been an early riser, and he was also prone to take a matutinal stroll before the more serious work of the day set in. Thus it had come to be a practice of his to time his walk by the morning meal of his relatives, and to share their repast.

He had no business to talk about on this said morning, but no suspicion was raised thereby, for this was customary. A cat is seldom so animated as when she is toying and clawing with a mouse. Ebenezer was extremely cheerful on this occasion.

"Well, Geoffrey, how's business going on? Flourishing, of course? I never knew trade to be better than just now."

"Johnnie's nothing to complain of, I think," said Geoffrey; and he gave his brother a kick under the table.

"Pretty fair," put in Johnnie, returning the subtabular lunge. "If Gip would put a little more soul into his work we should do well. But I dare say he'll improve."

Everybody—Jane and Mr. Lexley included—stared with unfeigned amazement.

"What's that?" cried Ebenezer, looking as if his ears had deceived him.

"I can't have him dawdling about the office, pretending to work when his mind's not in it. His books are something awful to look at." Geoffrey was as nearly as possible shouting "Bravo!" as he would have done had one of his eleven made a cut for four in the cricket-field; but he restrained himself in time, and relieved himself with another kick intended by way of encouragement.

"Who's been dawdling?" he asked in a growling kind of voice.

"I won't have it, I say," reiterated Johnnie, raising his voice, and looking intensely severe. "I'm the eldest, and it's my duty to keep my eye on you. I'm determined to be more strict."

"You're right there, of course," rejoined Gip, in a studiously submissive tone.

Uncle Ebenezer ran his hand through his hair, then scratched his head, and finally groping his way into his waistcoat-pocket, took a pinch of snuff, all being so many acts expressive of utter bewilderment, and intimating that he considered himself for some reason or other not quite wide awake. "He's beginning his airs rey-thar late i' the day," he said to himself; "but I never seed Geoffrey so funked before. That's more strange than t'other thing."

"I've half a mind to stop your cricket."

"You're the eldest, of course," responded Geoffrey, in a depressed tone, as if he was reflecting what a deprivation was in store for him unless he amended his conduct.

"I've stood it too long."

"I don't think Gip intends to neglect his duties, Johnnie. He likes cricket, I know; but he only plays out of mill-time, does he?" asked Jane.

"No, I've no fault to find with him there. It's

letting his thoughts wander in office hours that I object to—nothing more."

"You're quite well this morning, Johnnie?" asked Mrs. Lexley after a short pause, for everybody seemed too amazed to offer any remark. As for the deacon, he had nearly emptied his snuff-box, without feeling convinced that he was half awake yet.

"Quite well, thank you, mother."

"He'll play small enough afore many hours is over," thought Mr. Emlott, as he put his hat on. "So you're going to let Johnnie cock it over you, are you?" he said to Geoffrey as they walked to the mill. Johnnie had gone back for something he had forgotten.

"What do you mean, uncle? Johnnie's the eldest."

Ebenezer laughed. "Eldest—well, yes, he's the eldest. There's no one would go so far as to contradict that statement."

His uncle's laugh always provoked Geoffrey. "And he shall always have the rights of eldest when I'm there to defend them."

"Seems to me he doesn't want much defending, if this morning goes for anything. But it's his last opportunity, so we munna begrudge him."

"His last opportunity! Why?"

"You'll soon be the cock o' th' mixen yourself." "I wish he'd nowt else to be cock of," he added to himself.

Everybody persists in speaking in riddles just now. "What *do* you mean, uncle?"

"You'll know afore to-morrow morning, lad."

There was no more opportunity for conversation. Johnnie rejoined them, and the deacon's road diverged from theirs. He left them, and seemed much gratified by his nephew's perplexed face. As for the lads, they walked to the mill laughing heartily over the morning's episode. But the younger laughed superficially—in his heart he was pondering deeply.

"I couldn't have kept it up any longer, Gip. Your submissive look was too much for me. It was so unnatural. Ho, ho!"

"Ho, ho!" laughed Geoffrey. "I'll not live another day till I've cleared up this mystery. There's something I don't know of, which everybody else does know except Johnnie and myself." This to himself.

"You looked so frightened when I threatened to stop your cricket. It was admirably done. Ho, ho!"

"Ho, ho!" continued Geoffrey. "There's what Skillicorne said yesterday morning, and the manager's strange behaviour, and the Blands, and Cécile, and everybody, in fact. There's a secret afloat, which is secret to no one but Johnnie and me. I'll know it before I go to bed." So ran his ruminations.

"Poor mother! I couldn't go on after she began to defend you. She thought I was ill. Ho, ho!"

"Ho, ho!" went the mimic. "I'll go to Mr. Haddock; and if he can't help me, I'll go to Isaac Curling. He knows something, from Johnnie's account. He tried to throw him off the scent."

"My dear Geoffrey," the parson said, after many attempts to avoid the subject. "All I know is mere rumour. Certainly strange things are said about your father and brother, but I don't believe they are true."

"My father?" asked his visitor, looking astonished.

"Your father and brother," said Mr. Haddock. "Were you a member of my congregation I think I should have felt it my duty to have spoken to you voluntarily. As it is, my advice to you is this. See Mr. Juggins. There is, undoubtedly, a story afloat, which may be true, or false. I am not sufficiently acquainted with the particulars to speak positively. If true the issues are momentous, and you of all other people, saving Mr. John, ought to know the details."

Geoffrey almost shivered. The shadow of a great trouble he felt was upon him.

"I know you well, Geoffrey," said the kind-hearted parson, squeezing his hand as he departed. "There are men who, I believe, would congratulate you on your prospects. God forbid I should do so! This will be a greater trouble to you than to Johnnie himself."

Every word Mr. Haddock had uttered had but more and more mystified Geoffrey. Ninety-nine men out of the hundred would, long before this, have suspected the truth. It was not so with him. There was a glamour before his eyes—the glamour of a past life which, by its quiet home associations, rendered any such connection of ideas all but an impossibility. His infancy, his boyhood, his early manhood at the Grange—all was interwoven with strange and peculiar experiences. It is true his home life had been different from that of other families around him. His father and mother—they were not as other fathers and mothers. His brother Johnnie—well he knew that he was not the usual type of "the heir." Nevertheless, the sanctity of home had rested upon his life, and his heart was too reverent to harbour infidel imaginations. He could not become an unbeliever just because people were shaking their heads and using significant expressions.

He would see Mr. Juggins, as Mr. Haddock had suggested; but he would see Isaac first. It was strange how frightened he had become. He was as far from understanding the mystery as ever; but when it was cleared up, he felt it would be terrible. He turned back to the parson's door—he had not yet reached the gate.

"Will you go with me to Isaac Curling? He knows the secret. I think, too, he will tell it me."

Mr. Haddock reflected for one moment. Then he said quietly, "I will go with you." He disappeared for two minutes, and then returned. "I have been telling Mrs. Haddock not to wait dinner for me. It is no good asking you to take your lunch with us, and go afterwards?"

Geoffrey shook his head. "I must be back at the mill at two."

On the way to Lane End the conversation was desultory, and they were both relieved to come across Isaac himself, some distance from his cottage. He seemed in unusually good spirits.

"Coming to see me! Honoured, I'm sure. Couldn't have timed your visit better. It's five minutes to one, and Friday—fast-day, you know. You'll dine with me?"

"Fast-day—dinner, did you say?" asked the parson, taken aback. Perhaps he was reflecting what the world would say if he, a good Protestant, went in for self-mortification after this fashion. Perhaps his mortification was of another kind. He was to have had roast mutton and onion-sauce at the parsonage. "I'm afraid I must be home to dinner to-day. Very busy just now. Dinner, did you say?"

"Yes, dinner; and a rare good un too. Friday's

fast-day, you know," he added, in a still more cheerful manner. He nearly rubbed his hands in his glee ; but as it was a habit he had never contracted, he didn't.

"Thank you ; if I'd not other engagements."

"Bother other engagements ! I beg your pardon, sir; but you'll not get sich a dinner within a radius o' six miles, unless it's at Father MacTaggart's, o' St. Michael's."

They entered the cottage. Mr. Haddock had never seen the genealogist's front room before. He was filled with admiration. It was a chamber indeed to be proud of. Cases of books occupied one side; and the curious collection of armour in the corner and over the doorway, the array of copied brasses on the walls, the pedigrees set in old-fashioned frames, the portraits in dull gold, the antique furniture, the stained glass, the crockery—everything had its charm to a man of culture and taste as was Mr. Haddock. He little knew of the dirt and squalor that lay without this one room in all other parts of the cottage.

"Excuse me one moment, gentlemen." So saying, Isaac seemed to dive downwards into a dark-looking recess. It was the passage that led to the kitchen.

"There's Mr. Haddock and Mr. John's brother come to dine, Sairey. There's enough, I s'pose ?"

"Ay, ay, we'll do, being Friday, you know. You'll take the extry knives and forks in ?"

Isaac returned, laden with sundry articles, such as tumblers, knives, forks, spoons, and two coarse towels, which were evidently intended to perform the duty of napkins.

Isaac was his own waiter. Having re-dived down the passage, he shortly emerged with a big tureen, savory of pea-soup. This was done full justice to by all concerned.

"Not bad—eh?" said Isaac, with an air of triumph.

The parson readily assented, and Geoffrey took a second helping, being encouraged thereto by Isaac's example.

Then the host vanished with the bowl. There was a pause for a minute; and when he again appeared upon the scene, he bore an omelette. This tickled the parson's olfactory nerves to such a degree that he beat both Geoffrey and Isaac in a canter. But they were overweighted, having had twice of soup.

Once more the dark recess hid the genealogist from vision, and this time he returned more laden than before. There was a choice cut of young salmon, boiled to a point of delicacy. A bowl of parsley-sauce was dexterously balanced on his left arm, the ladle reposing gracefully against his breast; while a dish of potatoes and cauliflower, in odorous antithesis, lay upon his right, by way of counterpoise.

"So fond of fast-day," said the genealogist, with a large piece of salmon in his mouth.

"Fast-day!" rejoined Geoffrey, quite bewildered. "I thought—what on earth is fast-day?"

"Don't know what fast-day is? Ay, I forgot you was a Dissenter. Why, you goes without beef or mutton."

"But I thought fasting implied self-denial, or something of that kind."

"Self-denial! Of course it does. You refuses yourself beef and mutton. Don't you see? Take a little more sauce?"

"Thank you. But suppose you prefer, as a matter of personal taste—not bad judgment either—salmon done like this, with sauce and cauliflower?"

"Prefer it? I shouldn't trouble Spinks the butcher much if I could afford this kind of thing every day. But, you see, Friday only comes wunst in a week."

"But where's the self-denial?" persisted Mr. Geoffrey. Mr. Haddock listened with amused curiosity.

"Self-denial! Why, don't you see, I tries to think how nice a beef-steak, juicy and tender, with the gravy kept inside, would be; or a mutton cutlet, done to a nicety, wi' crumbs. There's the merit o' it—trying to keep your mind fixed o' beef and mutton when you has sich delicacies as salmon or mullet,

when they're i' season. But it's hard work," he added, in a fit of candour. "I does my best, and we can't do more nor that. My great difficulty was that ormelette. You tasted it?"

"Yes. It was first-rate."

Isaac looked gratified. "You may well say that. I got the receipt th' only time I was i' Paris. I saw three priests a-pegging away at a dish at t'other end o' th' room, and I said to th' waiter—he wur an English waiter—'What's them gents putting their whole soul into yonder? They're working like scavengers.' 'Oh,' says he, 'that's a ormelette.' 'A ormelette?' says I. 'Will you be so kind as to order me a ormelette, please?' I finished a big dish o't all myself, and for half a franc he gav' me th' receipt on't."

"And it's been a difficulty, has it?" asked Geoffrey, laughing.

"There's bin no difficulty in th' eating on it; but morally—that is, i' relation to th' fast-day—it's bin a bit o' a poser. Think o' endeavouring to concentrate yer mind o' beef or mutton, or even devilled kidneys—I beg your pardon, sir—when you've that afore your eyes?"

"Have you ever accomplished the feat?" asked the parson, thinking it was only polite to put in a word.

"Well, not yet; but I hopes to do i' course o'

time. Rome wasn't built in a day. But even a ormelette like this begins to pall when you takes it every Friday, not counting saints'-days and Lent. I shall do it by-and-by, depend on't."

"Suppose you should make some further discovery in your Friday's *cuisine* which should put even the omelette into the shade?" asked Geoffrey.

"Ah, we munna forecast evil i' that roads."

"Does Mr. Bradford fast?"

"No. But his predecessor did, and I've kep' it up ever since. I was clerk then. I likes keeping up a good old custom, specially when it's sich a agreeable one as this."

The look of anxiety had returned to Geoffrey's face. Mr. Haddock thought it better to proceed to the subject about which they had come.

"Will you take a turn up the street, Geoffrey? You need not be away more than two minutes. I think it will be better for me to talk to Mr. Curling alone."

Geoffrey signified his obedience by taking up his hat. "I must be at the mill at two," was all he said. When he came back a little later, it was strange to observe how much more haggard his face had become. Evidently his solitary walk had not tended to disburden his mind of anxiety.

"I have told Mr. Curling the object of your visit.

He agrees with me that you should see Mr. Juggins. He is your pastor, and a good and sympathetic man. It is peculiarly within his province to break to you what it is no good disguising will be painful intelligence to you." The parson also looked troubled.

"I am in your hands to do as you think best; but I am determined to know what is to be known before the day is out," said Geoffrey, with a mournful sternness.

"We are both assured that you ought to know as soon as possible the painful news."

"I will see Mr. Juggins after tea. Good-bye; and many thanks for your sympathy."

That something far more severely afflictive than he had yet imagined had happened, and that a time of crushing sorrow was about to begin, Geoffrey had no doubt as he walked slowly to the mill. He attended to his duties with a dead, leaden weight at his heart. He did not seem to care to talk to Johnnie. Rather he avoided his company and converse. He felt that it would be impossible for him to hide his feelings in his presence. Whatever this coming woe might be, one thing was certain from what had fallen from the lips of Mr. Haddock and others, his elder brother was immediately concerned in it; and, for all he knew, it might be attended with deeper sorrow for him than himself.

And yet he could not help keeping near to him. It was as if the old sense of Johnnie's dependence upon him for protection had returned with a ten-fold power. It seemed as if he might hear at any moment the voice of his brother beseeching his aid. He watched his every movement unseen. He took a strange interest in all that he did. He caught himself wondering if this might not be the last time that they two would be found labouring together in the same room. There was a sense of coming separation upon him—how or why, he could not tell.

Going home he snatched Johnnie's arm into his own with a feverish eagerness. They generally walked thus; but this afternoon his grasp was so strong and convulsive, it seemed as if he were trying to forge them into the two links of a chain, which no pressure nor power should be able to snap.

"You are hurting me, Gip."

The mental spasm was past, and he relaxed his hold. "I don't think I am feeling very well, Johnnie."

"I thought not. Lean on my shoulder. Why, your hand is burning hot."

"I shall be all right, after I've had a cup of tea."

"I say, old fellow, you work too hard."

"I thought I was so dreadfully lazy this morning." They both laughed. "I have to see Mr. Juggins on a little matter of business this evening. What are you

going to do? Oh, I forgot. Isaac says you are to meet him at seven o'clock in Glapton churchyard."

"Yes, we're going to take a brass, which he has discovered under a foot of soil. I never knew such a fellow for scratching and scraping as he is. He's always finding something. He thinks it must be Sir Hamon de Wentworth, who died from wounds received at Acre."

"I'm fond of Isaac."

"I'm so glad. I wonder sometimes you're not jealous of our intimacy."

"I'm not afraid. We ought to know and trust one another by this time."

Their arms were enlinked again, and so they reached home.

The cup of tea did not do that good which Geoffrey had prophesied. He dressed himself nervously. He twice washed his hands, they were so hot and dry. He seemed parched up, within and without.

"Mr. Juggins in?" he asked of the servant.

"No, sir; he went away about ten minutes ago. There's a meeting, I think, at Zion."

"Ask Mrs. Juggins if she can tell me?"

"She's gone to Mrs. Skillicorne's to tea. Can I give master any message when he comes back?"

"No, thank you. I will call again about half-past nine. I dare say he'll be in by then."

"He's well-nigh allus back by that time. He looks bad," she said to herself as he went away. "Poor gentleman! I don't wonder. It's a sad time for them at the Grange."

What a relief it was not to find Mr. Juggins at home! He felt it as a respite. He would have a walk to calm himself. It was possible he had imagined more than the worst. It was just one of those things a man was apt to do where all was uncertain except the certainty that some evil had befallen him. What a fine night it was! He liked late autumn. He liked it, he thought, more than any season of the year. The stars were not so bright as in winter; but there was a sober steadfastness about them which harmonized more with human feeling, especially when the heart was depressed and sad. With no exact determination in his mind to direct his steps, he wandered on and found himself close to the chapel. It must have been the servant's remark that had led him thither. It was just as well. He would peep in and see if it were likely that the chapel business would be over soon. There was not much to engage the chapel's attention at this time of the year.

Thus pondering, he stole along the side passage that led to the smaller meeting-room. As he was passing the window, the lights from within shone across his step. There were the usual vertical, leaden-

framed panes in the window, and several were wanting. Boys were destructive, and loved to throw stones at Lackington as elsewhere.

He paused. He would climb up and see who was there. The usual set, he supposed—Skillicorne, and Briggs, and Barnaby, and Garfitt, and his uncle, and Mr. Juggins, and possibly his cousin Ben. They were beginning to make a great fuss of Ben.

At this moment he was startled by hearing his own name pronounced. It was Mr. Juggins's voice. He looked in. How bright the room was, and how full, and how interested they all looked! Why, they were quarrelling! There was his name again. What had they to say about him?

He rested on the window-ledge. It was an uncomfortable seat. But he appeared to have forgotten the fact. From that moment he never stirred. Not a muscle seemed to move. His face was pressed against the glass. It was impossible to see his face.

END OF VOL. II.

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